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NOTES,  
ILLUSTRATIVE AND EXPLANATORY,  
ON THE  
HOLY GOSPELS:

ARRANGED ACCORDING TO  
TOWNSEND'S CHRONOLOGICAL NEW TESTAMENT.

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BY JOSEPH LONGKING, ✓

Junior Superintendent of the Greene-street S. School, New-York.

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VOLUME I. ✓

FROM THE ANNUNCIATION TO ZACHARIAS TO THE ORDINATION  
OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES.

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DESIGNED TO ACCOMPANY LONGKING'S QUESTIONS, VOL. I.

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## P R E F A C E.

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THE following "NOTES ON THE GOSPELS" were prepared at the earnest solicitation of several superintendents and teachers in our Sabbath Schools, who had long and deeply felt the want of some plain and portable work, explanatory and illustrative of the Holy Scriptures. That the book is all it should be, the compiler dares not hope; yet he is encouraged to believe that it will be a help—he trusts an *efficient* one—in enabling the teacher to impart that knowledge "which is able to make wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus;" and that it will not be less useful in assisting the pupil to gain a clear understanding of the "oracles of God."

The work makes but slight pretensions to originality, it being rather the design of the writer to ascertain the true import of Scripture from a careful examination of the expositions of wiser and better men than himself, than to obtrude on the reader his own unassisted thoughts. In many instances, the source whence information is derived is expressly acknowledged; but as this could not always be done, a list of the authors more frequently used in the preparation of these pages is here given:—Clarke's, Benson's, and Cobbin's Commentaries; Wesley's, Campbell's, and Bloomfield's Notes on the New Testament; Barnes's and Ripley's Notes on the Gospels; the Expositions of Doddridge, Watson, and Holden; Macknight's and Townsend's Harmonies; Greswell's Dissertations; the Pictorial and Cottage Bibles; Horne's Introduction; Jahn's Biblical Archæology; Calmet's, Watson's, and

Covel's Dictionaries of the Bible ; Jennings' Jewish Antiquities, and Allen's Modern Judaism ; Bush's Illustrations, and Harris's Natural History, of the Bible.

Particular attention has been paid to the illustration of such passages as contain allusions to Eastern customs ; care being taken to adduce nothing as illustrative which there was not reason to believe did truly apply to Jewish customs or modes of speech.

The compiler submits the work to the favourable notice of his fellow-labourers, with the prayer that the great Head of the church may bless it to the improvement of many.

J. L.

## INTRODUCTION

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THE word Gospel is said to be derived from a Saxon term signifying the *good word, history, or tidings* : and is used to designate both the system of divine truth taught by Christ and his apostles, as exhibited in the New Testament Scriptures, and the history of our Saviour's life. This history is contained in the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Besides these gospels, there have been a large number of spurious or forged ones, none of which were ever received by the church, in any age, as inspired productions. Very few of these fabulous narratives are now extant.

Of the personal history of the evangelists but little is known, beyond what is contained in the sacred records.

MATTHEW, who is also called Levi, was doubtless, like the rest of the apostles, a native of Galilee, though it is uncertain to what town he belonged. His occupation, previous to his call to the ministry, was that of a publican or tax-gatherer, under the Romans. This was a profession generally held in bad repute among both Jews and Gentiles ; for those who followed it, being commonly unprincipled and covetous men, were accustomed to practise every kind of extortion and injustice. To the Jews these officers were particularly odious ; not only for the reason already stated, but also because their presence constantly reminded them of the subjection of the Jewish state to a foreign power, which was highly galling to a people who regarded themselves as the special favourites of Heaven, and as vastly superior to all other nations

Hence the Jews held the publicans in such abhorrence that many of them,—especially the Pharisees,—refused to have any friendly or religious intercourse with them; and in their common speech they yoked “publicans and sinners” together as persons alike destitute of all pretension to morality or respectability of character.

The office of Matthew appears to have consisted more particularly in collecting the customs on articles that came by the sea of Galilee, and the tolls of passengers crossing over it. As he was one day engaged in the duties of his office, “sitting at the receipt of custom,” by “the sea-side,” at or near Capernaum, Jesus “passed by and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him.” Mark iii. 13, 14. It would seem, from Matthew’s ready obedience, that he had already such a knowledge of the Saviour as prepared him to understand and respond to the call which was now made upon him.

From the period of his call, Matthew, with the other apostles, appears to have been a constant attendant upon our Saviour, until the “cloud received him out of their sight.” After the ascension he continued at Jerusalem with “the twelve,” and received with them the gift of the Holy Ghost on the day of pentecost.

Little is known with certainty of the life of this apostle after this period. He probably continued to preach the gospel for some years in Judea and the places adjacent; but into what country he afterward went, or where and in what manner he died, it is impossible to determine. Tradition states that he travelled into Ethiopia or Abyssinia; made that country the scene of his apostolical labours; and there sealed the truth with his blood. Of this, however, there is no conclusive evidence.

There is much difference of opinion as to the precise



period when Matthew composed his Gospel, it having been assigned by eminent writers to different years between A. D. 37 and A. D. 64. As, however, it is the universal testimony of antiquity that Matthew wrote his Gospel before either of the other evangelists, and as it is not likely that the Christian church should have been left for any considerable number of years without an authentic history of our Saviour's ministry, the evidence of probability seems to be in favour of an early date.

MARK, the author of the second in order of the four Gospels, was not one of the twelve apostles: he is supposed to have been converted to Christianity through the instrumentality of St. Peter, who, in his first epistle, (v. 13,) calls him his "son," meaning, his son in the gospel. He was the son of a pious woman living in Jerusalem, whose name was Mary, and to whose house Peter repaired immediately after his miraculous deliverance from prison.\* From Col. iv. 10, it appears that the mother of Mark was sister to Barnabas, the fellow-labourer of the apostle Paul. Mark was himself for some time the companion of Paul and Barnabas in their ministry; (Acts xii. 25;) but at a place called Perga, in Pamphilia, he left them and returned to Jerusalem, (Acts xiii. 13,) at which Paul was so displeased, that when, on a subsequent occasion, Barnabas proposed again to take Mark with them, he refused to receive him, and in consequence a separation took place between Paul and Barnabas, the latter of whom, accompanied by Mark, sailed from

\* It has been suggested by some eminent critics, that the Mark mentioned by Peter, and the Mark spoken of in Acts xii. 12, were two distinct persons. The compiler has, however, followed the commonly received opinion, that they were one and the same individual.

Antioch to Cyprus, but where they went after leaving that island is not mentioned. It may be concluded that Paul was afterward reconciled to Mark, from the manner in which he mentions him in his epistles. Col. iv. 10; Philemon 24; 1 Tim. iv. 11. The passages referred to are the only ones in which Mark is mentioned in Scripture; but it is generally believed, on the authority of ancient writers, that after his journey with Barnabas he met Peter in Asia, and continued with him for some time; probably until the death of that apostle.

Mark, who was not an eye-witness to the facts related in his Gospel, is commonly believed to have received his information from St. Peter, and to have written his narrative under the inspection of that apostle, about the time that Matthew published his Gospel.

Respecting LUKE, the author of one of the Gospels and of the Acts of the Apostles, the New Testament furnishes but few particulars. It is not certainly known whether he was by birth a Jew or a Gentile. The probability, however, is, that he was a Jew, or that one of his parents was of Jewish origin, and that he was educated in the Israelitish faith. His name is nowhere mentioned in either of the Gospels, or in the Acts of the Apostles. In the latter book, however, which is universally attributed to him, he uses the plural pronoun "we" in relating a large portion of the travels of St. Paul, from which it appears that at that time he was himself in company with that apostle. From Col. iv. 14; 2 Tim. iv. 11; and Philem. 24, we learn that Luke was by profession a physician, and that he was with Paul at the time of his imprisonment at Rome.

Luke is supposed to have written his Gospel about A. D. 63, and the book of Acts at a somewhat later

period. Concerning his subsequent life, or the time, place, and circumstances of his death, nothing is positively known.

JOHN, the apostle and evangelist, was a Galilean, the son of Zebedee and Salome. Zebedee, with his two sons, James and John, were fishermen, who followed their occupation on the sea of Galilee, and appear to have dwelt at Bethsaida. As the father and his sons were one day in their fishing-vessel, employed in mending their nets, Jesus, who was passing along the seaside at the time, called the latter to be his followers, and "they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him." It is commonly believed that John was before this a disciple of John the Baptist, and that he was one of the "two disciples" mentioned in John i. 35-40, the other being Andrew the brother of Peter. He is supposed to have been the youngest of all the apostles.

Our Lord appears to have regarded John with peculiar affection, as he is termed emphatically "the disciple whom Jesus loved." He was one of the three who were chosen to be present at the resurrection of Jairus's daughter, at the transfiguration of Christ, and at the agony in the garden. He is the only one of the twelve who is mentioned as being present at the crucifixion, and to him Jesus then gave the strongest proof of his confidence and regard, by consigning to him the care of his mother.

A special intimacy seems to have existed between John and Peter. These two were sent by Jesus to prepare the passover, just before his crucifixion. Luke xxii. 3. They went to the sepulchre together, on hearing of our Lord's resurrection. John xx. 2-4. After the ascension they went together to the temple at the hour of prayer, and cured the lame man at the Beautiful gate.

Acts iii. 1-7. For preaching Christ they were both apprehended, cast into prison, and brought before the council. Acts iv. Peter and John were also selected by the apostles to go to Samaria, and confirm the converts made there by Philip.

John continued to exercise his ministry in Jerusalem and its vicinity for several years. He was there on the second visit which Paul made to Jerusalem after his conversion. Gal. ii. 9. Ancient ecclesiastical history states that he remained at Jerusalem till after the death of Mary, and then proceeded to Asia Minor, where he founded and presided over the "seven churches" mentioned in Revelation i. 4, residing chiefly at Ephesus. Thence he was banished by the Roman emperor to the isle of Patmos, where he wrote the book of Revelation. On his liberation from exile he returned to Ephesus, where he is said to have died in the hundredth year of his age. His Gospel, and the three epistles bearing his name, are supposed to have been written at Ephesus, in the latter part of his life.

The writings of this apostle indicate a temper remarkably mild and affectionate; though, judging from his desire on one occasion to call down fire from heaven to consume certain persons who refused to receive the Saviour, (Luke ix. 54,) as well as from his being one of those disciples whom our Lord designated by the appellation of "sons of thunder," (Mark iii. 17,) it would appear that he was *naturally* of a warm and impetuous disposition.

The Gospels were originally written in Greek, with the exception, perhaps, of that of Matthew, which is said by some to have been first published in the Hebrew language, for the use of those inhabitants of Judea who

had embraced Christianity. No copies of this Hebrew original, however, have ever been found.

It is a considerable advantage to the Christian church that the life of our Saviour was recorded by four distinct writers ; for not only are we thus put in possession of a more complete history of our Lord's life and ministry, but the many apparent discrepancies which are found, especially in the first three Gospels, incontestably prove that the evangelists did not write their narratives in concert, for the purpose of imposing upon mankind ; while at the same time these seeming variations admit of an easy solution, and are shown not to be contradictory to each other.



# NOTES ON THE GOSPELS.

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## LESSON I.

*Preface to Luke's Gospel—Divinity, Humanity, and Office of Christ.*—LUKE i. 1-4; JOHN i. 1-18.

LUKE i. 1-4.

**F**ORASMUCH as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us,

---

### NOTES ON LUKE i. 1-4.

Verse 1. *Forasmuch as many, &c.*] From these words it would seem that there were in existence, at the time of Luke's writing, a number of memoirs of the Lord Jesus Christ, of which the Christian world has now no knowledge: for that he does not refer to those writings which are received among us as the productions of Matthew, Mark, and John, is clear, as the gospel of the latter was not then written, and the learned are much divided on the question whether Mark's was, that history being supposed by many to have been penned subsequently to Luke's narrative. Besides, allowing the gospel by Mark to have been written previously to that of Luke, there would still have been but two, and two cannot be termed "many." The precise nature of these "declarations" or *narratives* cannot now be fully determined, though they seem to have been partial and perhaps confused accounts of our Lord's ministry—*partial*, because incomplete; *confused*, because deficient in arrangement. So much is fairly inferable from the third verse of this preface. They were not, however, *false* statements; for Luke admits that they

2 Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses, and ministers of the word;

3 It seemed good to me also, having had perfect under-

---

contained the things believed among the professors of the Christian faith, in which number he includes himself, and recorded what had been delivered by "eye-witnesses" and "ministers of the word." Their *defectiveness* formed, probably, the chief ground of objection to them. "Have taken in hand to set forth in order," means, *have attempted or undertaken to compose*; the expression does not imply failure. The word rendered "in order," in this verse, is not the same as that so translated in verse 3. "Declaration" is *narrative or account of*.

Verse 2. *Even as they delivered them*] The word "they" does not refer to the "many" who had written, but to the persons from whom these accounts had been at first obtained—the apostles, seventy disciples, and perhaps others who had been sent to preach the gospel. "Delivered" means *narrated, told*. *From the beginning*] Importing, probably, from the commencement of Christ's ministry, when he began to collect disciples. *Eye-witnesses and ministers of the word*] An "eye-witness" is one who testifies of what he has seen: the term is also sometimes used to denote one who has perfect knowledge of that whereof he alleges, whether it be matter of sight or not. "Minister" means *servant*, and "the word" here is generally supposed to denote the gospel: they were persons who *served in the gospel*—that is, were its preachers. It is doubtful whether Luke ever uses the term "word," as John does, to signify the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 3. *It seemed good to me, &c.*] Luke's chief object in composing his gospel appears to have been to furnish a full and authentic narrative of the life, doctrines,



standing of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus,

miracles, death, and resurrection of our Saviour, for the benefit of the Gentile converts, and thus to supply the defects of, or perhaps supersede, the incomplete sketches which were at that time in common use among them : for though the gospel of Matthew had been written some years, it is highly probable that it was not as yet extensively circulated out of Judea. He was doubtless moved to this undertaking by the Holy Spirit, yet, as one observes, "as a reasonable being, not a machine." "He had felt the greatest interest in the subject, made the most diligent inquiries, laid up in his heart what he had himself observed ; being thus qualified for the task, God chose him to perform it ; and that he might do it infallibly, he granted him his own inspiration."—*Watson*. *Having had perfect understanding*] The literal translation of the original would be, *having exactly traced or investigated every thing*. This care is not incompatible with inspiration, for the gift of the Holy Ghost did not set aside the exercise of man's natural faculties. *From the very first*] The primary import of the word rendered "very first" is, *from above*, and it is hence taken by some to denote inspiration. But so explicit and direct a *profession* of inspiration is not in the manner of the sacred writers. Besides, "the context requires the usual sense, 'from the very first :'"—(*Bloomfield* :) meaning the remote origin of the Christian dispensation in the birth of the forerunner of its founder. This view is strengthened by the consideration that Luke begins his history with the circumstances leading to this event, which Mark (i. 1) declares to be "the *beginning* of the gospel of Jesus Christ." *In order*] The "order" of St. Luke's gospel is rather one of classification or ar-

4 That thou mightest know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed.

range-ment than of chronological exactness. For instance, he disposes of the entire public ministry of John the Baptist (Luke iii. 1-20) before he mentions the baptism of Christ, although that event took place some months before the imprisonment of John. "This is evidently done to preserve the unity of his next and principal subject unbroken, that so the history of our Lord's ministry might begin and be continued from his baptism forward without any admixture of the history of John."—*Greswell. Most excellent Theophilus*] Because the word "'Theophilus" signifies a *friend of God*, some persons have supposed that Luke did not address his gospel to a particular individual, but to any pious Christian. This notion is not worthy of any consideration. Who Theophilus was is not now known, but it is deemed highly probable that he was a distinguished Grecian or Roman convert,—most likely, a Grecian. That he was a man of consequence is inferred from the manner in which he is addressed—"most excellent;" this being a title given to persons of eminence, as governors, &c. Acts xxiii. 26; xxvi. 25. It is supposed that the words are never used as expressive of character, meaning *an excellent man*, but that they always denote *office*.

Verse 4. *That thou mightest know the certainty, &c.*] Meaning, that he might have the fullest evidence of their truth. *Been instructed*] The word rendered "instructed" is that from which comes our term *catechized*. It does not, however, import what is now meant by catechetical teaching, but denotes that instruction, chiefly vocal, which in the early Christian church preceded and followed up admission into it by baptism.

## JOHN i. 1-18.

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

---

Although this gospel was addressed as a letter to Theophilus, it does not follow that the narrative was designed for his sole benefit. It was doubtless intended to be communicated, through him, to the whole church.

## JOHN i. 1-18.

Verse 1. *In the beginning was the Word*] By the "beginning" is meant *at the creation of the world*. Gen. i. 1. Whatever was in existence *at* the creation must have existed *before* creation; and whatever had being before any thing was created or made, must have existed *always*, that is, from eternity, and have been itself uncreated. Although the text does not *assert* that the Word was eternal and uncreated, it fairly implies as much. That by the term "Word" the Lord Jesus Christ is intended, is evident from a comparison of John i. 14, 15, with verses 29, 30, of the same chapter: and it is not unlikely that he was originally so called because he was the medium by which the mind or will of God was made known to men. The source whence John derived this term was, probably, the Jewish Scriptures, in which there are frequent instances of its employment. In Gen. xv. 1 it is stated that the "Word of the Lord" came unto Abram in a vision, saying, "Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward." The "word" cannot, here, mean the message or thing spoken, for "the 'Word' came, saying, 'I am thy shield.'" The pronoun "I" refers to the whole phrase, "the Word of Jehovah;" and if a *personal Word*—[a real being]—be not understood, no person at all is mentioned

by whom this message is conveyed, and whom Abram, in reply, invokes as "Lord God." In this personal sense, also, 1 Samuel iii. 21 can only be naturally interpreted, "And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh: for the Lord revealed (showed) himself to Samuel in Shiloh by *the Word of the Lord*." Here it is first declared that the Lord appeared; then follows the manner of his manifestation—"by the Word of the Lord."\* The reason why the terms, "Word," "Light," and "Life," are so frequently used in this chapter is supposed to have been with the view of correcting some very erroneous doctrines which prevailed in the church and the world on the subject of the divine nature and attributes, in which systems these words had a conspicuous place. Among these the dogmas of the Docetæ and Cerinthians, branches of the Gnostics, were very prominent—the former of which, among other errors, taught that Christ was a man in appearance only, not in reality; the latter admitted his human nature, but denied his divine. The Nicolaitans, mentioned with so much abhorrence in Rev. ii. 6, 15, are thought to have embraced the Gnostic heresy. *And the Word was with God*] This phrase cannot mean less than communion of the divine nature and participation of the divine glory. See John xvii. 5. That the expression does not denote an *attribute*, or inherent quality, of God, as the Socinians imagine, seems clear; for if an attribute, it were a mere truism to say that it was in the beginning with God, for He could never be without his attributes. Besides, how

\* That this was the sense in which the Jews of our Saviour's time understood these and similar phrases is manifest from their exposition of Deut. xxvi. 17, 18, "Ye have appointed the Word of God a king over you this day, that *he* may be your God."

2 The same was in the beginning with God.

3 All things were made by him ; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

---

can a *quality* become man, as the Word did ? Verse 17. *The Word was God*] Not *made* a god, as he is hereafter said to be made flesh ; nor constituted or appointed such, or a god by office ; but truly and properly God, in the highest sense of the term.

Verse 2. *The same was in the beginning with God*] 'This statement adds strength to the former, by declaring the union which existed between the "Word" and "God" to have existed in the beginning—that is, in eternity. This truth the preceding verse had not explicitly asserted, although its language doubtless implied as much.

Verse 3. *All things were made by him*] By "all things" is meant the universe—all material and immaterial things : what the apostle terms "things visible and invisible." Col. i. 16. These were not made by the Word as the mere instrumental agent, but as the principal, the efficient cause. The supposition that he created them by a delegated power is pronounced by Dr. Clarke to be "absurd, because impossible." See note on next verse. *Without him was not any thing made*] Without his agency ; the exertion of his power. This repetition is designed to confirm, beyond the possibility of doubt, what had been recorded in the preceding clause. Although the Scriptures thus strongly testify that the world was made by the adorable Son of God, they do not confine its creation exclusively to him, but attribute the same work (in other passages) to the Father and the Holy Ghost. Thus in Gen. i. 2 it is said, "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters," and in Job xxxiii. 4 we read, "The Spirit of God hath made me, and the Breath of the Almighty

4 In him was life ; and the life was the light of men.

---

hath given me life ;" (the latter clause is exegetical of the former.) In Heb. i. 1, 2, God the Father is represented as the efficient cause of creation, the Son being the mediate or instrumental cause ; while here, the same work is most emphatically declared to be performed by the Word, evidently not instrumentally, but by his own power and right. How can these passages be reconciled except on the supposition that these several divine personages, equal in power and authority, inhere in one substance—three Persons in one God ?

Verse 4. *In him was life*] These words seem to be intimately connected with the preceding verse, and show *how* the Word "made all things"—namely, by *the life-giving energy which dwelt within him*. The word rendered "in" is said by some eminent linguists to denote that this ability was *self-derived*,—that it was an essential quality of his nature. Hence he had the authority to confer life on whom and what he would. The "life" of which the Word is the source includes *all life*—vegetable, animal, rational, spiritual, and eternal. See Col. i. 17 ; John i. 12 ; Gal. ii. 19, 20 ; 1 John v. 11, 12 ; John v. 24. *And the life was the light of men*] By "life," here, the evangelist cannot mean that the life which proceeded from Christ, the Word, "was the light of men," for this would hold good but in a very partial sense. It is true that if the term "life" in the former clause signified merely spiritual life, or the renovation of man's nature, that "life" might be called the "light of men," in the sense of giving them the knowledge of salvation. But it is the opinion of the great mass of commentators, that by the phrase "in him was life" is meant, that the Word was the source of

5 And the light shineth in darkness ; and the darkness comprehended it not.

*all life.* The context, too, appears to require the language to be thus construed. Should not the term "life," in this clause, be understood in a personal sense—a title applied to Christ, as it is in 1 John i. 2? The "Light" designates the Logos, or Word, who is represented to be the conservator and dispenser of light—meaning, thereby, *moral light*—the Great Teacher. This he is through the instruction he imparts unto men by his word and Spirit, (Psa. cxix. 105 ; John xvi. 7, 8, 14, compared with Eph. v. 13,) and especially as having "brought life and immortality to light in his gospel," 2 Tim. i. 10. It is in this sense that Christ calls himself the "light of the world" in John viii. 12 ; ix. 5. It is not improbable that John borrowed the appellation "Light" as descriptive of our Lord, from the Old Testament Scriptures, in which the epithet is sometimes applied to him as a proper name. See Isa. x. 17. "Light" is also a frequent image of knowledge and happiness, especially of spiritual wisdom and enjoyment ; Isa. viii. 20 ; Psalm xcvi. 11 : this Christ was to man in his original estate of holiness, and still is to all who truly believe in him.\*

Verse 5. *And the light shineth in darkness*] "Darkness" is an emblem of ignorance and guilt, and of the misery consequent thereon. Proverbs ii. 13, 14 ; 1 John i. 6 ; Jude 13. The term is here employed to depict that

\* It may not be amiss to give the opinion of some learned men that John uses the terms "Light" and "Life" to correct a foolish notion in circulation at that time, that the Word was a superhuman but not a divine being, and that there were two beings superior to himself, one of whom was named Life and the other Light.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name *was* John.

state of ignorance of God and of spiritual wretchedness which had overspread mankind as with a mantle of thick darkness. Romans i. 21-23; iii. 9-18; Eph. iv. 17, 18. Still, amid all this moral gloom—this forgetfulness of, and opposition to, God—men were not utterly forsaken by him. There was some spiritual illumination imparted to “every man that cometh into the world,” (verse 9,) which enlightening was from Christ, and constituted what is called natural conscience. *The darkness comprehended it not*] To “comprehend” is to *admit*, to *take in*. “The allusion seems to be to air so gross and foul as to extinguish any light (link or torch) that may be introduced into it.” How baneful is sin! So long as it is indulged, it renders the sinner blind to the excellence of Christ’s doctrine and indifferent to the blessings he proffers. Or if, perchance, a ray of spiritual light should penetrate his mind, it hastens, like the pent-up air of a noisome dungeon, to extinguish the beam. It is because of the perversity of men’s wills, and the blindness of their hearts, that they do not form clearer perceptions of the divine Being, and more earnestly desire the possession of his favour. Mr. Benson remarks that in consequence of men’s not comprehending and profiting by the light heretofore afforded them, it became necessary that God should give a more perfect revelation of his mind and will than he had given in former ages.

Verse 6. *There was a man sent from God, &c.*] This was John the son of Zacharias and Elizabeth, commonly called the Baptist, whose extraordinary conception and birth is spoken of Luke i. 11-17; and the opening of his ministry, Mark i. 1-3. His name “John” imports *the grace of*



7 The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all *men* through him might believe.

8 He was not that Light, but *was sent* to bear witness of that Light.

*gift of God*; an appellation fitly given to one who was sent to proclaim the immediate accomplishment of God's gracious intentions toward men in the birth of the Saviour.

Verse 7. *The same came for a witness, &c.*] A "witness" is one who bears testimony to any truth. John gave testimony to Jesus, 1st. By announcing his coming; (Mark i. 2, 7;) 2d. By declaring who he was; (ver. 34;) and, 3d. By making known the object of his mission. John i. 29; Matt. iii. 11. From the truth of these predictions, it follows that John was an inspired prophet. *That all men through him might believe*] Might believe Jesus was the Christ. The words "all men" can be understood only of those whom he, John, addressed; or, at most, of the inhabitants of Palestine merely, for to them the mission of John was confined, and it was not designed that his dispensation should be prolonged beyond the time of his own ministry. Although John came as a witness to Christ, it was for *their* sake, not his: the Light needed no such testimony, but men's darkness did.

Verse 8. *He was not that Light, &c.*] No; for Christ was the Light. John viii. 12. It was highly important that the evangelist should give express information on this point, not only to strengthen the faith of such as had already believed, but that the professed disciples of the Baptist, who were numerous and widely scattered, (Matt. iii. 5; Acts xviii. 24; xix. 1-3,) learning that their master had borne testimony to Jesus as the Messiah, might be thus induced to embrace the gospel.

Verse 9. *That was the true Light, &c.*] Or, *He was,*

9 *That* was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

10 He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.

11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

&c. By "true Light," is meant the *real* Light. John was a "light"—the Saviour himself says (John v. 35) "he was a burning and a shining light"—meaning he was a distinguished religious teacher. Still, John shone only by reflection; Christ, in himself, and by his life and doctrine, was the true Light. *Lighteth every man that cometh, &c.* By his Holy Spirit. "As the human creature sees the light of the world as soon as it is born, in like manner this heavenly Light shines into the soul of every man to convince of sin, righteousness, and of judgment."—*Clarke*.

Verse 10. *He was in the world*] This he was from the beginning, preserving it by his providence, and making known, to and by his servants, the divine will. Here, however, the expression seems to refer to his appearance on earth as man, not to his pre-existent state. *And the world knew him not*] The term "world," in this case, does not refer to the material world, but to the inhabitants—the men and women dwelling in it. It is probable that the people of Palestine only are referred to, as our Lord's personal mission was confined to them. Matthew xv. 24. "Knew him not" is supposed to mean, *did not acknowledge him*. To "know Christ," in a saving sense, is to believe on him—to trust in him for salvation; this every one may do who diligently follows the drawings of the Spirit.

Verse 11. *He came unto his own*] Meaning, his own country. It is true that "the earth"—the whole earth—"is the Lord's;" yet there is a sense in which the land

12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, *even* to them that believe on his name :

of Israel is claimed by him as being more especially his. See Lev. xxv. 23 ; Hosea ix. 3. *And his own received him not*]. The words rendered "his own," in this clause, are not the same as those so translated in the preceding part of the sentence. *Here* they mean *his own people*—*his own subjects*. The Jews were called God's *own* or *peculiar* people, because he had chosen them to be the nation of whom the Saviour should be born, and had favoured them above any other people with many privileges of a civil and religious nature. Exod. vi. 7 ; Deut. xiv. 2. He had even condescended to be their actual sovereign, and was so regarded by the people for many years. 1 Sam. viii. 7 ; xii. 12. To this nation Christ came, as had been predicted of him, with offers of salvation ; (Matt. xv. 24 ; Acts iii. 13–26 ; ) but because his appearance was humble, and the deliverance he offered a spiritual one, instead of freedom from civil bondage, which was the nature of the deliverance they looked for, he was rejected by the mass of the nation, and subjected by the rulers to the most ignominious and cruel treatment. This infidelity and malignity resulted in the destruction of the Jewish nation.

Verse 12. *To as many as received him*] To "receive" Christ means to *believe on* him. Although the great body of the Jews rejected his claims, a few believed on him during his lifetime, and many more after his death. *To them gave he power to become the sons of God*] The word rendered "power" means *right* or *privilege*, and is so expressed in the margin ; also in 1 Mac. xi. 58. "Sons of God" means children of God by adoption. This relation-

13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

ship was conferred on them, as it is on all true believers, through faith in Christ ; and it is retained so long as they continue to be obedient and true worshippers of God. Rom. viii. 15-17 ; Eph. v. 1. *Even to them that believe on his name*] This is equivalent to "believe in him:" the *name* of the person being put for the person himself. John iii. 18.

Verse 13. *Which were born—of God*] The evangelist, having stated that such as believed on Christ became "the sons of God," proceeds here to explain the nature of that sonship, distinguishing it from the relationship to which the Jews laid claim. In consequence of the religious privileges to which that nation were elected or chosen, they were declared to be a "holy nation"—a "peculiar people;" yet it no more follows from this that they were all God's true spiritual children, than it does that all who in this day bear the Christian name are really the followers of Christ. The Jews, however, did regard themselves, in name and in fact, the children of God ; which claim they grounded, chiefly, on their descent from Abraham. (Against this error the Baptist expostulates, Luke iii. 8.) The sacred historian therefore says, that such as became "sons of God," through faith in Christ, "were born of God." This is an expression taken from natural birth. An infant may be possessed of life before it is born, though in a very imperfect manner, because its senses are but slightly exercised, if at all ; but no sooner is it born, than its senses begin to operate, and its mode of life is altogether changed. So with man in a state of nature—he has little or no sense of spiritual things : but no sooner does he believe on Christ, than the Holy Spirit introduces him

14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, as into a new state of existence—new perceptions, new desires, new enjoyments occupy his soul. In the language of the apostle, (2 Cor. v. 17,) “He is a new creature.” This is to be “born of God.” *Not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man*] By the expression, “not of blood,” (or, *of bloods*, for the original is in the plural form,) is probably meant that those who are the children of God do not become such in consequence of their descent from any eminently pious ancestry, as the Jews vainly supposed they did, by having “Abraham to their father.” Or, it may be that reference is here had to the bloody rite of circumcision, by which ceremony male Israelites were initiated into the Jewish church: and which rite was an emblem of the “circumcision of the heart,” as baptism is of the renewing influences of the Holy Ghost. Rom. ii. 28, 29; Titus iii. 5. “Not of the—flesh” is supposed to mean, not by natural generation. See 1 Pet. i. 23. The phrase, “nor of the will of man,” is thought to allude to the custom of adopting strangers into a family. Those who are adopted into God’s family receive not the relation from man, but from God; Christ, however, adopts them—then Christ is not man [merely] but [also] God.

Verse 14. *And the Word was made flesh*] The term “flesh” is here evidently used to denote *human* nature, or *man*. The Word became man. Phil. ii. 7. This is usually expressed by saying he became incarnate, which signifies imbodyed in flesh. The evangelist stated, in the first verse, that the Word was God; now he declares him to be made flesh. This does not mean that Christ’s nature was changed from God to man, for that could not be; it simply denotes that the Word united himself

(and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

to man by assuming man's nature; yet so as not to confound the divine with the human nature. He was perfect man, possessing a reasonable human soul as well as a human body; but yet, he was also "very God" *And dwelt among us*] That is, among his immediate disciples and relatives. The expression suggests the idea of such association and communion with him as is customary among the most intimate friends, and is therefore appealed to as evidence that John and the others alluded to could not be mistaken as to Christ's being a *real* human being. Thus they knew that he ate, drank, slept; that he was subject to weariness and pain, &c., &c. Mr. Wesley and some others translate the word rendered "dwelt" by *tabernacled*. *And we beheld his glory*] The original is very emphatic, "We *distinctly saw* his glory." —*Bloomfield*. "His glory," means, his majesty, dignity, divinity. There were many ways in which the apostles saw Christ's "glory"—as in his miracles, and the evidences he furnished of his wisdom and goodness: it is, however, more than probable that reference is here made to the transfiguration, (Matt. xvii. 1-8,) of which event Peter, James, and John were witnesses. *As of the only begotten of the Father*] That is, the glory *becoming* so august a personage, but which could belong to none other. It is remarked by some critics that the word rendered "as" does not import similitude, but *identity* and *truth*; it was "*the* glory of the only Son of the Father." The word translated "only begotten," as applied to Christ, not only indicates his divine nature, but also points him out as the object of the Father's highest affection, such as an only son usually is.—*Drs. Bloomfield and P. Smith*. *Full of grace*

15 John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me, is preferred before me ; for he was before me.

16 And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.

*and truth]* “Grace” means *favour*, and “truth,” *reality*, as opposed to mere appearance.

Verse 15. *John bare witness of him, &c.]* The “John” here spoken of is John the Baptist, who had borne testimony to Christ in the most open and public manner, as the word “cried” imports. *This was he of whom I spake]* When John made this declaration is not known, as no record of it is contained in the Scriptures. Doddridge suggests that it was when Christ came to be baptized. *He that cometh after me]* That is, he whose forerunner I am. Christ did not enter on his office until about six months after the commencement of John’s ministry. *Is preferred before me]* “Preferred,” here, is supposed to denote superior dignity, both of nature and office :—the phrase would then read, “is superior to me.” *For he was before me]* “A plain declaration of Christ’s pre-existence.”—*Holden.* John’s example should teach all Christians, and especially Christian ministers, to honour their Master, not themselves.

Verse 16. *Of his fulness]* Meaning, of the fulness or abundance of grace, &c., which dwelt in Christ, and of which John had spoken in the fourteenth verse. In order to preserve the connection between these two verses, (the fourteenth and sixteenth,) some commentators read the fifteenth in parentheses ; others recommend its transposition, so that it may follow the eighteenth. *Have all we received]* And so shall all others who truly and steadfastly believe, for Christ is the ever-living fountain of felicity to

17 For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

18 No man hath seen God at any time : the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

all who properly apply to him. *Grace [for good]* "Grace" commonly denotes favour or benefit. The word rendered "for" is taken by many in the sense of upon—"grace upon grace," or innumerable benefits. The passage may mean, that all men receive privileges and advantages in proportion to the improvement which they make of those already bestowed on them.

Verse 17. *The law was given by Moses*]. The "law" here spoken of is that which was promulgated at mount Sinai : it is said to be given by Moses, because he was the mediator between the Almighty and the Israelites, and received it from God for them. This law was given as a benefit to that people, being designed to restrain them from transgression, by making them sensible of the "sinfulness of sin." [Gal. iii. 12 ; Romans iii. 20.] as well as, by its sacrifices, &c., to point to the bringing in of a better hope—the gospel :—yet it was [comparatively] harsh and burdensome, and its blessings scanty. *Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ*]. The dispensation of the gospel is eminently one of "grace and truth;" not being the "shadow of good things," but their reality : especially in the diffusive influences of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 18. *No man hath seen God, &c.*]. That is, God the Father. "To see" frequently means to learn, to know : hence "hath seen God," probably signifies, hath known God, or learned his true nature and character. 1 John iii. 2. *In the bosom of the Father*]. To "be in the bosom," is a phrase importing the utmost intimacy and



## LESSON II.      [Date, B. C. 6.

*Prediction of the Birth of John the Baptist.*

## LUKE i. 5-25.

THERE was, in the days of Herod the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia :

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strongest affection—hence we say, “a bosom friend.” The expression is thought to have had its origin in the eastern custom of reclining, by which the head of the person at the right hand was brought near the breast of him on the left. *He hath declared him*] Distinctly disclosed his nature and will—namely, in the gospel. The superiority of the gospel over the law consists, *partly*, in its being a clearer revelation of God’s will. It is not improbable, however, that the word “declared” has reference, also, to *all* those manifestations of the divine Being to man, which had taken place from the creation; on all which occasions the Angel Jehovah—the Word—is supposed to have represented the Godhead.

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## NOTES ON LUKE i. 5-25.

Verse 5. *There was, in the days of Herod the king*] This Herod is he who is commonly termed Herod the Great; a talented, but very cruel and ambitious man. He was the son of one Antipater, a distinguished Idumean or Edomite, of which country Herod also was a native. Having ingratiated himself with the Romans, he was, through the joint influence of Mark Antony and Octavius, appointed by the Roman senate king of Judea, and consecrated to that office at Rome about B. C. 37. He was a partisan of Mark Antony when that general disputed the

and his wife *was* of the daughters of Aaron, and her name *was* Elisabeth.

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dominion of the Roman empire with Octavius ; but, after the battle of Actium, which terminated so fatally for Antony, Herod hastened to Rome, and made his court to the conqueror with so much address as to secure his settlement in the throne of Judea. He afterward erected two splendid cities, which, by way of compliment to the emperor Augustus Cæsar, he named after him. One of the cities was Sebaste, (the Greek word for Augustus,) the other was Cesarea, on the Mediterranean sea. To gratify the Jews, he, at an immense expense, rebuilt the temple, which had fallen into decay ; but whatever gratitude that people may have felt on this account, was soon lost in the hatred which his acts of tyranny and barbarity produced, and in the disgust which his utter disregard of their peculiar notions and usages inspired. *Judea*] This celebrated country is situated in the south-eastern part of Syria. On the north it is bounded by the Lebanon mountains, but its southern border is lost in the open desert which separates Palestine from Egypt. As, however, it is necessary to take some line of boundary here, in order that the length of the country from north to south may be stated, it cannot be far wrong to draw it from the stream of El Arish, (supposed to be the scriptural "river of Egypt,") eastward to a point about twenty-five geographical miles south of the Dead sea, on the borders of the valley which extends between that sea and the gulf of Akaba. Assuming this southern boundary, and fixing the northern one at the parallel of the stream which flows from Lebanon into the sea about five miles to the north of Sidon, Palestine will appear to be comprehended between 30 *deg.* 40 *min.* and 33 *deg.* 36 *min.* of northern latitude ; and the length of a

line drawn from the northern limit to the southern, through the centre of the country, will not be less than 180 miles. The western limit of the country is the Mediterranean sea, and the eastern, including the domains east of the Jordan, (originally allotted to the two tribes of Reuben and Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh,) is assumed to be the mountains of Gilead. Taking this view of the country, the average breadth will be about sixty-five miles; though in its widest part, (near the southern border,) it is probably not less than ninety-two miles, and in its narrowest, (the northern limit,) not more than twenty miles across. The editor of the "Pictorial History of Palestine," from whom this description is chiefly taken, estimates the superficial extent of the country to be about eleven thousand geographical square miles; though, says he, "its real surface is much greater: for Palestine being essentially a hilly country, the sides of the mountains and slopes of the hills enlarge the actual surface to an extent which does not admit of calculation." Admitting the estimate of eleven thousand square miles, Judea is a little larger than the state of Vermont, though not quite one-fourth the size of the state of New-York. It is spoken of in the sacred writings by a variety of names: see Gen. xi. 31; xl. 15; Exod. xv. 14; Hosea ix. 3; Lev. xxv. 23; Zech. ii. 12; Matt. ii. 20, 21; Heb. xi. 9. *A priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia*] Called Abijah, 1 Chron. xxiv. 10. Abia is the Greek, and Abijah the Hebrew orthography of the same name. "Course" signifies a *company* or *class*. Abijah was the chief of the eighth course or class into which David, when making arrangements for the proper celebration of the temple service, directed the priests to be divided. Compare 1 Chron. xxiii. 6 with 1 Chron. xxiv. 7-18. It is probable that one reason for

6 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

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the division was, that the priesthood had become too numerous for them all to officiate with convenience at one time; be that as it may, the classification was by divine appointment, as appears from 1 Chronicles xxviii. 11, 13. These companies attended at the temple in rotation, each serving one week: they entered on their duties on the sabbath. At the three great festivals, the whole body of the priesthood officiated. Only four of the courses of the priests are known to have returned from the Babylonish captivity, and that of Abijah is thought not to have been one of these; (Ezra ii. 36-39; Nehemiah vii. 39-42, and xii. 1;) but it is to be understood that these four classes were subdivided into twenty-four, which assumed the name of the original companies established by David. *His wife was of the daughters of Aaron*] A descendant of Aaron, brother of Moses, and the first high priest of the Jews. These particularities furnish strong evidence of the truth of the gospel history; for if false, the statement could have been easily disproved, and doubtless would have been.

Verse 6. *They were both righteous*] That is, persons of uprightness and integrity. *Before God*] In the sight of God, eminently pious. The original imports *reality*—they *were* what they *seemed to be*. *Walking in the commandments, &c., blameless*] “Walking in the commandments” means, constantly *keeping* them—*obedient* to them. The word “commandments” is taken by some to express the moral law, and “ordinances,” the ceremonial code. Perhaps this is too nice a distinction. “They are words of nearly similar import, and each includes whatever God has expressly commanded, whether positive or moral.”—

7 And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren; and they both were *now* well stricken in years.

8 And it came to pass, that, while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course,

9 According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot

*Watson.* The phrase simply asserts they obeyed all God's requirements. *Blameless*] Irreproachable before men. They were in good repute with men for their piety, as well as approved by God.

Verse 7. *Were both well stricken in years*] Were advanced in life—elderly. Zacharias, however, could not have been beyond fifty, since after that age a priest was superannuated. Num. viii. 24, 25. Of Elisabeth's age we have no means of judging. Whether, therefore, her conception was strictly miraculous, or merely preternatural, cannot be determined.

Verse 8. *He executed the priest's office*] The more important duties of the Jewish priests were to offer sacrifice, to burn incense, to make intercession, and to bless the people. Comp. 1 Chron. vi. 49 with 1 Chron. xxiii. 13. *Before God*] "The temple was regarded as the house of God. Those who were performing service in the temple, or at the altar, [of burnt-offering,] were consequently said to be *before*, or *in the presence of*, God. *In the order of his course*] When it came, in the order of the classes, to be the turn of his class to perform the temple service."—*Ripley.*

Verse 9. *His lot was to burn incense, &c.*] Jewish writers state that the priests in each class distributed the various services among themselves by *lot*. The most honourable of the duties allotted to ordinary priests was the burning of incense. The article now commonly termed "incense" is a white aromatic gum, obtained chiefly

was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.

from Arabia. It is procured by making incisions in the trees which produce it, from which gashes the gum flows out. It burns with a bright and strong flame, not easily extinguishable. The incense used in the temple service was a mixture composed of four drugs, termed in Exodus xxx. 34-36, stacte, onycha, galbanum, and frankincense. "Stacte" is supposed to be pure myrrh; and myrrh is described as a "precious gum of extremely bitter taste, and a strong, though not disagreeable smell. It entered into the composition of the most costly ointments." "Onycha" is thought by some to be a species of mussel procured from the East Indies, the shell of which yields an odour strongly resembling musk; others, however, take it to be the gum ladanum, adopting the rendering of the Arabic, which, instead of "onycha," reads *ladana*. "Herodotus affirms that drug to be much used by Arabians in perfumes; and according to Pliny, who mentions its fragrant smell, it was the extract of an herb called ladan." "Galbanum" is a pale-coloured, soft gum, of a "strong, piercing smell, and of a bitterish, warm taste."—*Harris' Natural History of the Bible*. "Frankincense," or *olibanum*, is a gum resin of a brownish colour, which when laid upon burning coals or a hot iron sends forth a very fragrant vapour. It is the product of a very fine tree (*Boswellia serrata*) belonging to the family of the turpentine bearing trees.—*Pictorial Bible*. *Into the temple*] The apartment in which incense was burned was the "holy place." (See further in note at the close of the lesson.) "The Jews tell us that there were three priests employed about the service of the incense; one who carried away the ashes left on the altar at the preceding service; an-

10 And the whole multitude of the people were praying without, at the time of incense.

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other who brought a pan of burning coals from the altar of sacrifice, and who, having placed it on the golden altar, departed; a third, who went in with the incense, sprinkled it on the burning coals, and, while the smoke ascended, made intercession for the people. This last was the part that had fallen to Zacharias."—*Macknight*. The odour of the incense is represented in Scripture to be symbolical of the "prayers of saints." Rev. v. 8; viii. 3, 4. Says the Rev. W. Jones, "As the smoke and odour of this offering was wafted into the [most] holy place, close by the veil of which stood the altar of incense, so do the prayers of the faithful ascend upward, and find admission into the highest heaven." And again, "As the fragrance of incense is agreeable to the senses of man, so is the prayer of faith acceptable to God."

Verse 10. *The whole multitude of the people*] From this mention of a "multitude" of worshippers being assembled, many commentators think that this must have been either the sabbath-day or a festival, for on ordinary days the attendance was not numerous. It *may* have been so. It is worthy of remark that the Jews regarded the offerings made at the morning and evening sacrifices as the offerings of *all* Israel: as, however, all the people could not attend in person, twenty-four men, "who feared to sin," were chosen as representatives of the nation. These were called "men of the station," or "stationary men." It was their duty to be present on all occasions of public worship, to lay their hands on the head of the sacrifices, pray, and receive the benediction. Through these representatives the whole body of the people were supposed to be present. *Were praying without*] Meaning, in the courts surround-

11 And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord, standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

ing the sacred edifice. (See further at the end of the lesson.) *At the time of incense*] Incense was offered morning and evening; (nine and three o'clock;) the time in which incense was offered was also the time of public prayer. Acts ii. 15; iii. 1; x. 9. When the priest whose lot it was to burn incense entered the holy place, a small bell was rung to notify that the time of prayer was come. When this was heard, those priests and Levites who had not taken their stations hastened to do so, and the people in the courts of the temple commenced their prayers. These prayers were perfectly silent; and were continued until the priest returned and pronounced the benediction. It is probably to the deep silence which prevailed throughout the temple during the time of offering incense and of prayer, that there is allusion in Rev. viii. 1, 3. Let us learn from this example, that it is not enough for us to be *present* merely at the worship of God; our hearts should be intently engaged with him in prayer, that his grace and blessing may rest upon us. And especially should this be the case while the minister is interceding for us: that we may mutually strengthen each other's faith, and confirm each other's hope.

Verse 11. *There appeared unto him an angel*] An "angel" is an intelligent spirit, the first in rank and dignity among created beings. Angels are supposed to have existed before the formation of our world, and the Scripture countenances the idea. Job xxxviii. 4, 7. The appellation given them is expressive of their office, "angel" signifying *messenger*; and Hebrews i. 4 represents them as "ministers" or servants "of God, sent to minister to the heirs of salvation." Their exact number is not stated in



12 And when Zacharias saw *him*, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

13 But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias : for thy prayer is heard ; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.

Scripture, but is always represented as very great. The apostle John, describing the vision he had of the glory attendant on the divine Being, (Rev. v. 11,) says of the angels, "the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands." All angels, however, are not *good* ; for the word of God speaks of some who "kept not their first estate," but who, having "sinned, were cast down to hell." 2 Pet. ii. 4 ; Jude 6. This is spoken of Satan and his unhappy followers. The term "angel" is also applied to men, (2 Sam. ii. 5,) and figuratively to the elements, as servants of the Most High, "fulfilling his word." God's intercourse with men by means of angelic agents was formerly frequent ; (for a few instances see 1 Kings xix. 5 ; 1 Chron. xxi. 15, 20 ; Dan. vi. 22 ;) it is supposed, however, that no such communication had been had since the days of the prophet Malachi, about four hundred years prior to the event here noticed.

Verse 12. *When Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, &c.*] Evidently apprehending him to be a messenger from the invisible world. His agitation was, probably, the result of, 1st. the suddenness and unexpectedness of the appearance ; 2d. of that consciousness of God's displeasure which rests upon the minds of even good men, and leads them to fear, while in the body, so near an approach of the dread Majesty of heaven as is indicated by the companionship of a being from his immediate presence.

Verse 13. *The angel said, Fear not*] This was said to calm the agitation of Zacharias' mind, that he might the more readily attend to the angel's message. *Thy prayer*

14 And thou shalt have joy and gladness, and many shall rejoice at his birth.

15 For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and *is heard*] “Prayer” is the expression of a desire, by petition, for any good. It is disputed whether this declaration refers to the prayer Zacharias had just offered, and which, as the mouth of the people, doubtless had respect to *national* subjects,—probably the coming of the Messiah,—or to those entreaties for offspring which he may be presumed to have put up in former years. Why may not both be understood? The expression, “thy prayer is heard,” is equivalent to saying, *is heard with favour*—so “heard” as to be granted. 1 John v. 14.

Verse 14. *Thou shalt have joy and gladness*] Literally, “he shall be joy to thee;” that is, the occasion of joy. This is thought to be spoken in allusion to his name, John, *the grace or mercy* of God: the usual consequence of a manifestation of mercy being, to create joy. The word rendered “gladness” denotes *exultation*, and is therefore a stronger term than “joy.” “A child of prayer and faith,” says Dr. Clarke, “is likely to be a source of comfort to his parents.” *Many shall rejoice at his birth*] “At his birth” does not mean, at that *time*, but *on account of his birth*—in consequence of the benefits conferred on them by or through him. This was an intimation that he would be a public blessing.

Verse 15. *For he shall be great*] This John was, both in his character and office. As a man he possessed most, if not all, the essential qualities of true greatness, and his office “was the greatest ever assigned to mere mortal, for he was the herald of the world’s divine Redeemer; and the effects and results of his ministry were great, in preparing the way of the Lord.” *In the sight of the Lord*]

shall drink neither wine nor strong drink ; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.

16 And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.

A form of speech importing *reality*—true greatness and excellence. *He shall drink neither wine nor strong drink*] The “wine” here spoken of, is the expressed juice of grapes, and is supposed not to have been intoxicating. It formed a very common drink among the Jews. By the phrase “strong drink,” which is here used, fermented wine, or the common wine mingled with drugs, so as to produce a stupifying or intoxicating effect, may be intended. It certainly does not mean “strong” drink in *our* sense of the term—that is, ardent spirits, as brandy and gin—for distilled spirits were not then known. Like the Nazarites, (Num. vi. 2, 3,) John was to be distinguished by abstemiousness and self-denial. *He shall be filled with the Holy Ghost*] To “be filled with the Holy Spirit,” is to be illuminated, sanctified, and guided by his influence. The expression seems here to denote that John should be designated to the ministry, and eminently qualified for the discharge of the duties of his office by the Holy Ghost, who is the third person in the adorable Trinity, and is therefore God. 2 Cor. iii. 17. It is by his gracious operations on the human soul that all those holy dispositions and delightful emotions which characterize the confirmed Christian are created.

Verse 16. *Children of Israel*] The Jews, descendants of Israel or Jacob. *Shall he turn to the Lord their God*] Meaning, he would convert them to the true worship of God. The Jews of this period were not addicted to idolatry, as some of their forefathers had been ; yet, under the garb of piety, and amid services avowedly rendered to the

17 And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,

true God, they were mostly strangers to vital religion, and rested secure in the form of godliness. It was from this heartless devotion that John was to convert or turn them, by his preaching. Matthew iii. 1-6. By the "Lord their God" is meant the Lord Jesus Christ, as is apparent from the following verse. Thus it appears that Jesus Christ is God.

Verse 17. *He shall go before him*] Before the "Lord their God;" for the pronoun "him" must in strictness be so referred. This is further confirmed by a comparison of verse 76 with chapter iii. 4. *In the spirit and power of Elias*] It is worthy of remark that this, the first prophecy of the New Testament, is to the same effect as the last one of the Old; affording a clear intimation of the close connection existing between the two dispensations. By "Elias" is meant the prophet Elijah, Elias being the Greek rendering of the Hebrew word Elijah. This person was one of the most celebrated of the ancient prophets; and was particularly distinguished for his boldness in vindicating the honour of God, in opposition to the religious adoration paid at that time by the Israelitish nation to idols. Malachi, the last of the prophets, when speaking of the advent of the Messiah, had foretold that it would be preceded by the coming of Elijah,—meaning, by one *resembling* that prophet; as the angel here interprets the prophecy. This John did in his manner of life, dress, zeal, and integrity of character. The "spirit" of Elias probably means, with similar zeal and courage; and the "power," the mighty energy of his teaching. *To turn the hearts of the fathers to the children*] Malachi has in addition, "and the heart of the children to their fathers." Some commentators understand the passage to refer to

and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just ; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

the animosities which existed among the different sects of the Jews, by which they suppose the peace of families to have been much disturbed, and to contain a prediction that John would be greatly successful in allaying these dissensions, and in uniting the people in sentiment and affection. Others think the word translated "to" should be rendered *with*—"he should turn the hearts of the fathers *with* the children"—meaning, that persons of all ages would, by a mighty reformation effected through him, be turned to God. "The latter interpretation seems entitled to the preference, as the general success of his ministry is the subject of the prophecy, and not any of those particular effects which would follow, as matter of course, from that as from every other revival of the spirit of true religion."—Watson. *And the disobedient to the wisdom of the just*] By the "just" is meant the *righteous*—the *upright* ; and by the "disobedient," the *wicked*. "Wisdom" may import *perception* or *feeling* :—if so, the sense of the passage is, that he, John, should convert the wicked to the views and dispositions of the righteous. This was done to a considerable extent. *Make ready a people prepared, &c.*] The word rendered "prepared" is "used by Greek writers," says Mr. Watson, "to express an army supplied with all necessaries, so as to be fit for service ; and to describe a ship furnished with proper stores, and therefore ready to sail. It was by turning the hearts of men to God, by producing conviction of sin and danger, and penitential sorrow on account of sin, and by introducing the views and feelings of just men as to religious and eternal things, that men were thus fitted and furnished to receive the doctrine of the advent of the

18 And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this ? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years.

19 And the angel answering, said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God ; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to show thee these glad tidings.

20 And behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because

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Messiah, as the true sacrifice for sin and the hope of man. A state of repentance, represented by the dispensation of the Baptist, *prepares* men for the Lord. This is its only office ; it reconciles not man to God, but puts him into a state to be reconciled to him through the atonement. It is not a state of safety ; it places us not in the refuge, but in the way to it."

Verse 18. *Whereby shall I know this ?*] Because the thing was, humanly speaking, improbable, Zacharias doubted the veracity of the prediction, and therefore asked for a sign that he might know it should be accomplished, unmindful of the evidence afforded in the appearance and address of the angel.

Verse 19. *I am Gabriel*] This name is compounded of two Hebrew words which, according to some, signify *man of God*, and to others, *might* or *power of God*. Gabriel was the messenger who had been employed to inform Daniel of the time of the Messiah's appearance on earth. Daniel ix. 21. *That stand in the presence of God*] This declaration implies high rank ; it being usual in the East to describe the favourites or highest officers of a prince by saying, *they see the presence of*, or *stand in the presence of*, the monarch. *Glad tidings*] "Tidings" means *news* ; the "glad news" alluded to, is the announcement of the birth of John.

Verse 20. *Behold, thou shalt be dumb, &c.*] This was

thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.

21 And the people waited for Zacharias, and marvelled that he tarried so long in the temple.

22 And when he came out, he could not speak unto them : and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple ; for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless.

23 And it came to pass, that as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house.

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not only a "sign" to Zacharias, but a punishment on him for his unbelief. It was, however, of such a character as to promote the benevolent designs of the Almighty, by exciting the attention of the Jews to the child whose birth was attended by so many remarkable circumstances. It would appear that Zacharias was not only deprived, for the time being, of the power of speech, but of that of hearing also ; for when, on the day of circumcising his son, the friends desired him to inform them by what name he would have the child called, they made known their wishes by signs. Verse 62.

Verses 21, 22. *The people waited*] Remained at their devotions longer than usual, waiting for Zacharias to dismiss them with the usual blessing. Num. vi. 23-26. It is supposed that the performance of the duties at the present allotted to Zacharias usually occupied about half an hour. At this time, however, he was probably much longer absent. *They perceived that he had seen a vision*] A "vision" is a supernatural appearance—an apparition. *He beckoned unto them*] Probably informing them, by signs, that a vision had appeared to him.

Verses 23-25. *The days of his ministration*] The week for which he was appointed to serve. During their specified term of labour the officiating priests were not allowed

24 And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying,

25 Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men.

to leave the precincts of the temple. *Hide herself*] Lived in a very retired manner. *Thus hath the Lord dealt, &c.*] Meaning, in this merciful manner: an expression of gratitude. *Take away my reproach*] To be without children was considered, among the Jews, a peculiarly unhappy circumstance.

As it will be necessary, in the elucidation of the gospel history, to make frequent reference to the temple and its environs, it may be well to give in this place a general description of that magnificent structure, to which reference can in future be made.

The temple was erected on mount Moriah, one of the hills classed under the general name of mount Zion, for which reason it is sometimes called Zion, as in Psalm cxxxii. 3, 4. This hill stood eastward of mount Zion, properly so called, and was purchased by king David of Araunah or Ornan the Jebusite. 2 Samuel xxiv. 24; 1 Chron. xxi. 25. The space on the summit of the mount not being large enough for the buildings to be erected thereon, Solomon increased the area by building a high wall from the base of the hill, and filling the hollow between the wall and the acclivity of the hill with earth. One part of this wall is said to have been four hundred cubits, or upwards of seven hundred feet in height, allowing the cubit to have contained (as is usually estimated) 21.888 inches.

It is the opinion of some writers that there have been three temples, namely, the first, erected by Solomon; the



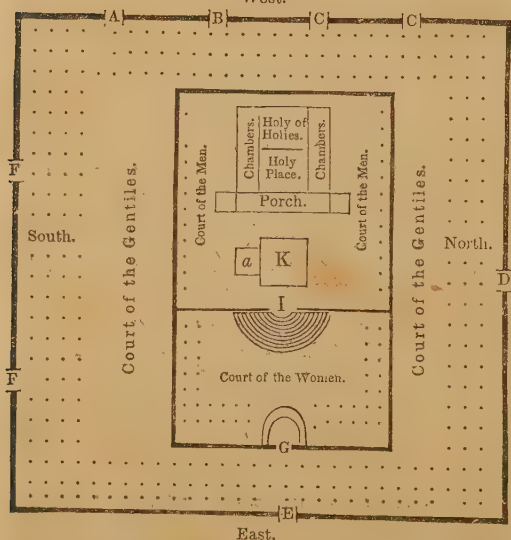
second, by Zerubbabel, a Jewish prince ; the third, by Herod the Great. But this opinion is very properly rejected by the Jews, who do not allow the third to have been a new temple, but only a gradual reparation and enlargement of the second : and this view accords with the prophecy of Haggai, (chapter ii. 9,) that “the glory of this *latter* house”—the temple of Zerubbabel—“should be greater than that of the former ;” alluding to the Messiah’s honouring it with his presence and ministry.

Solomon’s temple was completed about B. C. 1004 of our common chronology, and dedicated in the following year. It was destroyed by the Chaldeans under Nebuchadnezzar, about 588 B. C., 2 Chron. xxxvi. 6, 7, 19. After the Babylonish captivity, the temple was rebuilt by Zerubbabel, but with vastly diminished splendour. Hag. ii. 3. The dimensions of this temple, in breadth and height, were double those of Solomon’s,—in length they were equal. It was finished about 515 B. C.

Five hundred years after the completion of the second temple, Herod the Great, king of Judea, aware that the sacred edifice had received much damage, both by the ravages of time, and the injuries it had sustained in war, offered to repair it, hoping thereby to ingratiate himself with the people, and to do away the recollection of his numerous acts of tyranny and oppression. This work he commenced in the year B. C. 16 ; and in about nine years, during the whole of which time he employed eighteen thousand workmen upon it, had so far progressed with the undertaking that divine service could be celebrated therein : though the Jews continued to make additions and improvements for several years afterward. Herod spared no expense to render this structure equal, if not superior in magnitude, splendour, and beauty, to any thing among

# GROUND PLAN OF THE TEMPLE AND ITS COURTS.

West.



- A Gate of Shallecheth.
- B Gate Parbor.
- C C Gates Asuppin.
- D Gate of Tedi.
- E Gate of Shushan.

- F F Gates of Huldah.
- G Beautiful Gate.
- I Gate of Nicanor.
- K Brazen Altar.
- a Ascent to the Altar.

mankind. Josephus calls it a work the most admirable of any that had ever been seen or heard of.

It may be proper to remark that by the phrase "the temple" was meant not only the sacred edifice itself, but also the numerous chambers and rooms belonging to it, and the several courts by which it was surrounded. This remark it will be necessary to bear in mind, lest the reader of the Scriptures should be led to suppose that whatever is there said to be transacted in "the temple" actually transpired in the interior of the holy house. None but the priests and Levites were permitted to enter "the temple," properly so called. The works said to have been performed therein by our blessed Lord, were really executed in the courts, to which alone he, in common with all Israelites who were not of the tribe of Levi, had access. A brief description of these will now be given.

The temple was surrounded by two courts, which embraced an area of at least half a mile in extent. The outer one was called the "court of the Gentiles," because it was accessible to people of all nations; though strangers, and unclean persons, were allowed to proceed no farther under pain of death; notice of which was given by inscriptions on the pillars, in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. This was by far the larger court, and is supposed to have comprised a space equal to fourteen English acres; two-thirds of which lay to the south of the temple. It was surrounded by a wall, inside of which, between the gates, were piazzas or covered walks, each walk about twenty-six feet wide, paved with marble, above which was a range of apartments. On the eastern, northern, and western sides of this court there were two rows of these piazzas; on the southern, three. The one on the east was called Solomon's porch, (John x. 23,) because it was erected on

the terrace which he had raised from the valley below. Each double porch rested on a triple, and each triple porch on a quadruple row of columns, the last row being contiguous to the wall. The columns were so large that three men could scarcely extend their arms around them. The roof, which was flat, was composed of cedar. These walks afforded a grateful shade and protection to the people in hot or stormy weather. This outermost court being assigned to the Gentile proselytes, the Jews, who did not worship in it themselves, conceived that it might be lawfully put to common uses ; and therefore allowed the buyers and sellers of animals for sacrifices, and also the money changers, to transact business within its bounds. On two occasions our Lord drove those persons from the court, declaring that it was a place of prayer for *all* nations, and that to make it the scene of common traffic and barter was to desecrate it.

Within this outer court was a lesser one, of an oblong, rectangular figure, being nearly twice as long from east to west as from north to south, called the court of the Israelites. This was ornamented with piazzas on the east, north, and south ; near its western end stood the temple. This court was divided into two parts,—the first, or eastern portion was called the court of the women, because it was their appointed place of worship, beyond which they might not go, unless when they brought a sacrifice, in which case they went forward to the men's court. They were not, however, its sole occupants, as the male Israelites frequently made it the scene of *their* devotions. The women's court was entered by three gates—one on the north, one on the east, and one on the south. In this court one or more chests (the Jews say eleven) were placed for the reception of the voluntary contributions of

the people toward defraying the expenses of public worship, such as sacrifices, wood, salt, &c., &c. ; it was consequently called the treasury. Mark xii. 41 ; John viii. 20. West of the court of the women was the men's court ; they were separated from each other by a wall. Communication was had between these two divisions by the gate Nicanor, and a flight of semicircular steps : three gates on the north, and as many on the south, connected 't with the court of the Gentiles. These two courts, (the men's and women's) were collectively termed the court of the Israelites. Within the court of the men was that of the priests, separated from it by a low wall or railing. This enclosure surrounded the altar of burnt-offerings, and to it the people brought their oblations and sacrifices ; none but the priests were permitted to enter it. From this court twelve steps ascended to the temple. The body of the court of the women was raised several feet above that of the Gentiles ; the court of the men was still higher ; and the elevation of the court of the priests was superior to that of the men.

The temple, properly so called, was erected on the very summit of mount Moriah, fronting eastward. As rebuilt by Herod, it is computed to have been rather more than 182 feet long, 127 wide, and 182 high. It was divided into two apartments and a portico or entrance, which portico extended about twenty-seven feet on each side beyond the body of the house. The first or outer apartment was called the sanctuary or holy place ; the second or inner one, the most holy, or holy of holies. The ordinary priests had access to the holy place, but the high-priest alone was privileged to enter the most holy, and that but once the year, on the day of national atonement. It was in the sanctuary that the golden candlestick, the table of show-

bread, and the altar of incense were placed, and consequently this was the place where the angel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias. In the most holy, of the first temple, the ark of the covenant was deposited, and there the shechinah, or symbol of the divine presence, manifested itself. In the second temple this was an empty room. These apartments were divided from each other by a richly embroidered veil or curtain. It is supposed that this was the veil which was rent in twain at our Saviour's crucifixion; thus emblematically representing that the way to the throne of grace was now opened to all mankind through the one great mediator, Jesus Christ. Heb. x. 19-22. On the north and south sides of the temple, resting against the sacred edifice, ran a suite of chambers for the priests, &c., three stories high, which reached to less than half the height of the temple.

The vast sums which Herod expended in adorning this structure gave it the most magnificent and imposing appearance. All the Jewish writers praise it for its beauty and the costliness of its workmanship; it was built of white marble, exquisitely wrought, and in many places was overlaid with gold. "Its appearance," says Josephus, "had every thing that could strike the mind and astonish the sight; when the sun rose upon it, it reflected such a strong and dazzling effulgence that the eye of the beholder was obliged to turn away from it, being no more able to sustain its radiance than the splendour of the sun." At a distance, the whole temple looked literally like "a mountain of snow, fretted with golden pinnacles."

## LESSON III.      [Date, B. C. 5.

*Annunciation to the blessed Virgin—Interview between Mary and Elisabeth.*

LUKE i. 26–56.

AND in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth,

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Verse 26. *In the sixth month*] In the sixth month from the conception of Elisabeth, the wife of Zacharias. Verse 24. *The angel Gabriel*] This is the same messenger who was employed to communicate the intelligence of the approaching birth of John. Verse 19. *Was sent unto a city of Galilee named Nazareth*] At this time the country embraced within the limits of Judea was divided into five provinces, three of which lay on the western side of the Jordan and the Dead Sea, one to the east of those waters, and one on the extreme south of Judea. This latter district, called IDUMEA, is said to have been annexed to Palestine by the Romans. The western provinces were, GALILEE, in the north, comprising the territory formerly claimed by the tribes of Asher, Naphtali, Zebulon, Issachar, and part of Dan; SAMARIA, lying between Galilee and Judea, and embracing the allotment of half of Manasseh and the entire of Ephraim; JUDEA, in the south, enclosing within its bounds the inheritances of Simeon, Dan, Benjamin, and the princely tribe of Judah. The eastern province was called PEREA, including the territories of half the tribe of Manasseh, and of the tribes of Gad and Reuben. "Nazareth," the residence of her who was to become the mother of our blessed Saviour, was situated in the allotment of Zebulon, nearly midway between the lake of Gennesareth on the east and the Mediterranean Sea on the west; about six miles

27 To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name *was* Mary.

south-west of Cana, and probably about the same distance north-west of mount Tabor. The city stands partly in a valley, and partly on the side of a rocky hill, facing the south-east, and is environed by mountains of no great height. Rev. J. D. Paxton, under date of 1836, declares it to be one of the best towns he saw in Palestine. It contains a convent and two churches. The houses are chiefly of stone, one story high. In 1827 the population was estimated at two thousand persons, mostly Christians. The present name of the place is Nassara.

Verse 27. *To a virgin—of the house of David*] That is, a lineal descendant from David, king of the Jews. *Espoused to a man whose name was Joseph*] From the genealogy given by Matthew it appears that Joseph was also of the royal line. Matt. i. 16. "Espoused" means *promised in marriage*. It was usual among the ancient Jews for "fathers to select wives for their sons and husbands for their daughters. The marriage covenant was an agreement made in the presence of witnesses between the father and brothers of the bride on the one side, [or, if she had none, those acting for her,] and the father of the bridegroom on the other. This covenant was sometimes confirmed by the additional solemnity of an oath." —*Jahn*. There was commonly an interval of some months between the espousal of the parties and their actually dwelling together as husband and wife. Although this "espousing" was not deemed to be *positive wedlock*, the ceremony was considered of so binding a nature as to cause the parties to be regarded as husband and wife, and unfaithfulness in either was considered adultery. Deut.



28 And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, *thou that art* highly favoured, the Lord is with thee : blessed *art* thou among women.

xxii. 23-25, 28, 29. It is not unfrequent at the present day for Jewish parents to make similar engagements for their offspring, while they are yet mere children. It is supposed by many commentators that the evangelist does not mean to be understood as saying that "Joseph" was of the house of David, but that "Mary" was ; and in accordance with this opinion the words, "espoused to a man whose name was Joseph," are transposed in the notes. This arrangement is supported by the fact that this and the preceding verse (as well as the verses following) refer wholly to Mary.

Verse 28. *Hail,—highly favoured*] The word rendered "hail" is by Sutcliffe translated *rejoice*. Instead of "highly favoured," Campbell renders, *favourite of Heaven* ; Bloomfield and Watson think the common version preferable. *The Lord is with thee*] Or, the Lord *be* with thee ; that is, be favourable to thee : a frequent form of salutation among the Hebrews. Judges vi. 12 ; Ruth ii. 4. The same salutation was adopted by the early Christians. *Blessed art thou among women*] This, probably, is equivalent to, "Thou art the most favoured of women." In what respect, however, was Mary "highly favoured" and "blessed?" Most assuredly, in being chosen to be the mother of the Saviour. As he was to be "the seed of the woman," it was necessary that he should be "born of a woman ;" and as he was to be "the son of David," it was equally necessary that that woman should be descended from David. Mary was thus descended ; and certainly she was "favoured" and "blessed" in being selected. The Romanists, however, have misconceived her character ;

29 And when she saw *him*, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.

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they address prayers to her, and have even changed this very salutation into a prayer. In the judgment of charity, therefore, (and God forbid that any emotion contrary to love should influence us,) such devotions must be regarded as verging toward idolatry, and those who render them, so far as those acts are concerned, as having departed from the purity of the Christian faith. In proof that this language is not too strong, take the following passages: "Holy mother of God, who hast worthily merited to conceive Him whom the world could not comprehend, by *thy* pious *intervention* wash away our sins, that so, *being redeemed by thee*, we may be able to ascend to the seat of everlasting glory, where thou abidest with thy Son for ever."—*Collect. in Hor. ad usum Sarum*. Paris, 1520, fol. 4. "Let our voice first celebrate Mary, *through whom the rewards of life are given unto us*. O Queen, thou who art a mother and yet a chaste virgin, *pardon our sins*, through thy Son."—*Ibid.*, fol. 80. "Cardinal Bembas, some time the Pope's secretary, calleth the same blessed virgin, Our Lady and Goddess."—*Jewell's Apology*, Am. ed., pp. 66, 67, n. The Scriptures assure us that "there is one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus;" (1 Tim. ii. 5;) and "by him [alone] we have access unto the Father," Eph. ii. 18. Whether, therefore, *divine* adoration be ascribed unto the virgin or not, it does appear that such regard is had to her by the members of the Romish Church, as is contrary to the inspired writings.

Verse 29. *Troubled at his saying*] Perplexed or confused by it—not yet fully understanding its import. *Cast*

30 And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary; for thou hast found favour with God.

31 And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.

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*in her mind*] Thought, or revolved in her mind—reasoned with herself, as to the meaning of the address. Fear, however, probably produced by the presence of the celestial visitant, seems to have been her predominant feeling. The angel, therefore, prior to communicating the particulars of his message, seeks to calm her disquietude.

Verse 31. *Thou shalt conceive and bring forth, &c.*] The doctrine of the miraculous conception of our Lord has been the ridicule of the scorner ever since the commencement of the Christian era. And why? *Because it cannot be fully comprehended by human reason.* But is this the *only* truth which reason cannot take in? Far from it. Man is endued with an intelligent spirit, but who can define its essence, or describe its mode of existence? No one. Shall, then, a clearly revealed truth be cast aside, because human reason is inadequate to its full comprehension? Besides, the doctrine in question is *not contrary* to reason; it is above its grasp: and that it is so arises from the imperfection of our knowledge. The foundation of the Christian religion lies in this *very* truth. Man having sinned, and being utterly unable to make satisfaction for his sin, God, in the fulness of his love, sent his own Son to take upon him our flesh, that he might, *in the same nature which had offended*, make full satisfaction for the sins of the whole world, by the voluntary sacrifice of himself upon the cross. Now in what other way could he take on himself the *nature* of the offender, than by being born of a woman? By being, in his humanity, not only “made flesh,” but born “of a woman,”

(Gal. iv. 4,) he did most closely ally himself to us, and became "bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh." By being procreated of the Holy Ghost his human nature was sinless, having no seeds of evil in it; and in his subsequent practice he was "holy, harmless, and separate from sinners." His example was therefore that of a *perfect* man, and his sacrifice that of "a Lamb without blemish." Some, indeed, ask what was the need of any satisfaction; might not God forgive without it? his doing so would show greater mercy. But these persons consider not that God is just; nay, that he is justice itself; and justice, by its nature, must exact to the uttermost its due. To remit is mercy, not justice. Again, it may be asked, How, then, can God forgive at all? can infinite justice and mercy stand together? This question could never have been answered in the affirmative, had not God answered it in the wonderful plan he has devised for the redemption of mankind: a scheme which fully satisfies all the demands of justice, and yet enables God, consistently with his most righteous government, to extend mercy to the penitent, believing offender. His mercy exalts his justice, as his justice does his mercy, and both magnify his wisdom.

Here the whole Deity is known,  
Nor dares a creature guess  
Which of the glories brightest shone,  
The justice or the grace.

*And shalt call his name Jesus*] "Jesus" is the Greek form of the Hebrew word Joshua, or Jehoshuah, and comes from a word which signifies *to save*. Hence the angel says to Joseph, (Matt. i. 21,) "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." He does not say he shall save his people *Israel* from

32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest : and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David :

their Gentile enemies, but indefinitely, “his people,” *all who believe in him*, whether Jews or Gentiles ; and that not from temporal calamity or degradation, but *from their sins* : that is, from the guilt and penalty, from the power and pollution of sin. Thus, from the beginning, was the notion of a political Messiah excluded from the minds of Joseph and Mary.\* The salvation referred to in the above passage Jesus procures by his death and intercession, : being through these that the pardon of past offences, the witness of that pardon, and the renewing influences of the Holy Spirit are obtained for all men. Reader, art thou in the conscious possession of these inestimable blessings ? They are freely offered thee—lay hold on them by faith.

Verse 32. *He shall be great*] “Great in power and authority, in glory and fame, in office and administration ; yet not in a civil or worldly sense, as the event proved. All this is accomplished, however, more gloriously in his mediatorial kingdom. Or, more particularly, our Lord was ‘great’ in his person, as God and man united : hence Isaiah says, (ix. 6,) ‘His name shall be called—the mighty God, the everlasting Father.’ He was ‘great’ in his *prophetic office*, in his doctrine and miracles, ‘mighty in word and deed,’ in his *priesthood*, as offering the universal sacrifice for the sin of the whole world, not to be repeated, and establishing upon its merit a constant, ever prevalent, and universal intercession : and ‘great’ as the *King of*

\* In two places of the New Testament (Acts vii. 45 ; Heb. iv. 8) the name “Jesus” is used when the writers are speaking of Joshua, the successor of Moses.

*kings and Lord of lords*, to whom ‘all power is given in heaven and in earth ;’ and ‘of whose kingdom there is no end.’”—*Watson. Shall be called the son of the Highest*] “The Highest” is a title of Deity, (Psa. xviii. 13 ; lxxxvii. 5,) and here denotes the almighty Father. It is supposed to have been first given in reference to the exalted abode of God in heaven. Some commentators say, the words “shall be called” simply mean, *shall be* ; do they not, however, express more, namely, not only that he *shall be*, but, that he shall be *acknowledged*—“shall be called”—the Son of God? They appear to relate to Christ’s public and glorious designation in all ages of the church. It will be remembered that it was for declaring himself to be the Son of God that the Jews adjudged Jesus to be worthy of death. *The Lord shall give unto him the throne of his father David*] David is here called the “father” of Jesus, as being his progenitor ; in the same manner as the inhabitants of New-England speak of its early settlers as “their pilgrim *fathers*.”

Reference to the genealogies of our Lord, given Matt. i. 1–17, and Luke iii. 23–38, will set this matter beyond all reasonable doubt. It is well known that the Jews were very careful of the purity of their genealogical records, of which it is said, that besides those kept by private families, there were copies or originals preserved in public offices. There is reason to conclude that the registers of Matthew and Luke were extracted from these sources of information, the authority of which was unquestionable ; and from their being open to public inspection, the Jews could easily satisfy themselves of the validity of the claims of Jesus to this relationship. Indeed, it does appear that of this they were satisfied, for we find him frequently addressed by them as the “son of David.”

The attentive reader will observe that the evangelists have traced our Lord's pedigree in different lines, Matthew's being run through the branch of Solomon, and Luke's through that of Nathan, another son of David. The reason is, that Matthew gives the descent of Joseph, the reputed father of Christ, but Luke that of Mary, his mother. Both branches, however, became united in the person of Salathiel. Matt. i. 12; Luke iii. 27. It may be objected that Jesus was not the son of Joseph, and therefore could not claim through him. To this it is answered, that, by the Jewish law, an adopted son was entitled to all the family privileges, and was regarded the same *in law* as the natural son of the adopter. If, therefore, Joseph had no male children older than Jesus, (and it is presumed he had not, or the genealogy would not have been given as it is,) he would be the *legal* heir to the throne. Still it was a point of vast importance that Mary, as well as Joseph, should be proved to be of the *house of David*, because the Christ was to be "of the seed of David" *according to the flesh*, which he was not by virtue of being the adopted son of Joseph. Hence the great advantage of Luke's table. It will be noticed that Matthew (i. 16) asserts Joseph to be the son of Jacob, while Luke (iii. 23) terms him the son of Heli. This is accounted for thus: Heli was the father of Mary, consequently Joseph was his son-in-law; but in accordance with a custom by no means unfrequent among the Jews, he is ranked as his son. For a similar instance see the case of Salathiel, who, in Luke iii. 27, is called "the son of Neri," although merely his son-in-law, (some say grandson by his mother's side,) the immediate father, or rather grandfather of Salathiel being Jechonias. 1 Chron. iii. 17; Matt. i. 12. This apparent difficulty may be

removed by supposing Mary to be an only child, or, at least, that she had no brother; in which case her husband would become the adopted son of Heli, and be reckoned his son in the public registers, that the name of Heli's family might not be lost in Israel, females not being competent to transmit a name. For a somewhat similar case see Neh. vii. 63: "And of the priests—the children of Koz, the children of Barzillai, *which took one of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite to wife, and was called after their name.*" The genealogies of Matthew and Luke are extremely important, as showing that the lines of Solomon and Nathan united in Christ, who was therefore, both in *nature* and *law*, the son of David. This was a point of vast importance to the Jews, and is not less so to Christians, since it was foretold that the Christ should proceed from the house of David; (Isa. xi. 11; Jer. xxiii. 5, 6;) and it is not improbable that the knowledge of this relationship had some influence in inducing a multitude of the Jews to wish to make Jesus king.

The "throne" of David denotes his kingdom or dominion. In the eighty-ninth Psalm the Almighty is represented as saying of David, "His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me: it shall be established for ever, and as a faithful witness in heaven:" but a higher throne than that of Israel was evidently intended, even that universal mediatorial dominion to which our Lord has succeeded; for the psalm is prophetic of Christ and of his government. It should not be overlooked that David was a typical character, and his kingdom a typical dominion; and it is in the antitype of each that we are to look for the fulfilment of the promise of perpetuity made to David.



33 And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever ; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

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Verse 33. *He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever*] By "the house of Jacob," the Israelitish people may be intended, as, in the character of a mediatorial prince, Jesus is no less sovereign of the Jews than of other nations. Some commentators, however, understand the phrase in a figurative sense, and suppose that the "house of Jacob" is a synonyme for all true believers, whether Jews or Gentiles, in the same manner as the Christian church is sometimes called "the Israel of God," &c. The former opinion appears most satisfactory. *And of his kingdom there shall be no end*] The kingdom of Christ is twofold : 1st. It consists in a spiritual dominion over the wills and affections of men, by moral influences, by which they subject themselves to his laws and authority. This may be termed an inward spiritual kingdom. Rom. xiv. 17 ; John xviii. 36 ; Luke xvii. 20, 21, margin. It consists, 2d. In that exercise of external government over the world, as Head of the church and for her benefit, by which his truth, in all its righteous and peaceful influences, shall be established. This government embraces all those discoveries, improvements, and changes which are taking place in the earth, and which will ultimately subserve the moral recovery of mankind, through the overruling providence of Christ as mediator. This distinction (of a twofold kingdom) removes the discrepancy which might otherwise be supposed to exist between the declaration that the kingdom of Jesus should "have no end," and the statement made 1 Cor. xv. 28, where it is said that after the world is judged he shall deliver up the kingdom to the Father. Christ's *mediatorial kingdom* will end with the present world, as there will then be no

34 Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?

35 And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing, which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God.

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longer need for it; but his spiritual dominion in the mind and affections of holy reasonable beings will continue to all eternity; and Jesus will still preside as Head over the redeemed in heaven, and perform such acts of government as their condition may allow and circumstances require.—*Macknight—Benson*. This is the only kingdom that shall never cease, and He the only sovereign who can at all times defend, sustain, and reward. How important, then, to have an interest in his kingdom, and how insignificant, compared with *his* favour, is the favour of earthly monarchs!

Verses 34, 35. *Then said Mary—How shall this be?*] This is not the language of distrust or of doubt, but of a desire to be further instructed, for the regulation of her conduct. *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee*] The “Holy Ghost” is the third person in the adorable Trinity, and is consequently God. Acts v. 3, 4. He should “come upon” her to create within her the immaculate body of the Redeemer. “The production of the human nature of our Lord is uniformly ascribed to the exclusive agency of the Holy Spirit,” so far as the agency of one of the divine persons can be exclusive of the others. *The power of the Highest shall overshadow thee*] The “Highest,” here, is supposed by Mr. Watson to be the Word, the second person in the Trinity; and this “overshadowing” is thought to refer to the act of uniting the divine and human natures in the same person, so that the Christ

36 And behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age ; and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.

37 For with God nothing shall be impossible.

38 And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord ; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.

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might be "Immanuel, God with us." *Therefore also that holy thing, &c.]* Or offspring, meaning Christ. *Shall be called the Son of God]* Some commentators think that this appellation is given merely because the human nature of our Lord was produced by a direct divine agency ; this opinion, however, is contrary to many passages of holy writ, in which the title, "Son of God," is bestowed in reference to his divinity. Nathanael so entitled him, because he had had proof of his prescience. "St. Paul also uses the title, Son of God, as opposed to what Christ was 'according to the flesh,' the descendant and son of David : while the term 'only-begotten' entirely shuts out the notion that he became the Son of God by his miraculous conception, which was but a mode of creation ; since in the sense of creation he is not the 'only-begotten,' but shares that with all the angels, and with the first human being. \* \* \* \* The mode of expression by which the concluding clause is introduced leads also to the same conclusion. The particle rendered 'therefore' is consequential, and is not to be understood as though the angel were giving a reason why Christ should become the Son of God, but why he should be owned and acknowledged such." For fuller information on this very important verse see Watson's Exposition.

Verses 36-38. *Thy cousin]* The more general term, *relative*, would here be preferable ; it would more exactly represent the original word.—*Ripley*. Though Elisabeth

39 And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda ;

40 And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth.

was of the house of Aaron, and Mary of that of David, they might be related on their mothers' side : the law not prohibiting marriages into other tribes than their own, excepting in the case of heiresses. The case of Elisabeth is mentioned to inspire Mary with confidence, and to assure her that what was now promised would be fulfilled.

*With God nothing shall be impossible*] That is, nothing which he has promised to perform, or sees fit to do. This thing he had promised to execute ; therefore, however unlikely it might appear, she ought not to doubt, for the work was of God ; neither did she. This declaration is of the same import with that made to Sarah when the birth of Isaac was predicted. "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" *Mary said, Behold the handmaid, &c.*] An expression of pious acquiescence. A "handmaid" is a female servant ; the "Lord's handmaid"—the Lord's servant. The reliance of Mary on the protection of the divine Being must have equalled her submission to his will. She exposed herself not only to loss of reputation, but of life ; (Deut. xxii. 23, 24 ;) satisfied, however, that the matter was of God, she fully, freely, confidently yielded herself to his will, assured that he could and would preserve her.

Verse 39. *Mary arose in those days*] The words, "Mary arose," are equivalent to saying that she *set out* or *started* on a journey. "In those days" means *at this time* ; probably within a very few days of the angel's visit. *And went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Judah*] The cause of Mary's "haste" is supposed,

by some, to have been a prudential desire in her to make her relatives acquainted with the announcement made to her by the angel, that so, having preoccupied their minds with the important truth, they might be both more inclined and better enabled to defend her reputation, should it be assailed. "The hill country" denotes the southern portion of Judea, which was noted for its ruggedness, and somewhat mountainous aspect. The particular city to which she went is not positively known, though the probability is strong that it was Hebron. This city belonged to the priests, (Josh xxi. 9-11,) and is situated on the highest ridge of the hill country. It is one of the oldest cities of Canaan, being built seven years before Tanis, or Zoan, the ancient capital of Lower Egypt. Num xiii. 22. It was while residing here that Abraham received the promise of a son; here David commenced his reign; here repose the mortal remains of Abraham, "the friend of God,"—of Isaac, the "child of promise,"—of Jacob, once "the supplanter," but afterward "the prevailer;" and of their wives, Sarah, Rebekah, and Leah. The emperess Helena (mother of Constantine the Great, the first Christian emperor) erected a splendid church over the supposed tomb of the patriarchs—the cave of Machpelah—but it (or one since erected, purporting to be it) has been long converted into a Turkish mosque, which neither Christian nor Jew is allowed to enter, though both esteem it a holy place. The greater part of the town, as existing at present, stands in a valley near to that of Eshcol, though its outskirts rise in a small degree on four of the hills by which it is surrounded, especially on the hill to the southeast. The town has a very old appearance; the streets are narrow and dirty, and to a great extent arched over. Few of the houses look well—they are badly aired and

41 And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost:

42 And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.

43 And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

44 For lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.

45 And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.

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badly lighted.—*Paxton*. The Pictorial Bible says, "It is rather a neat town, with unusually high houses; but the streets are narrow and winding. It has some small manufactories of cotton, soap, glass, lamps, and trinkets, which render it the most important place of the district." Hebron is now called Khalyl, *the beloved*, or El Khalyl, *the beloved of God*, an appellation frequently applied to Abraham. It contains about five thousand inhabitants, mostly Mohammedans. The Jews deem this a sacred residence, and esteem highly the privilege of dwelling here. Hebron is probably from twenty to twenty-four miles south (inclining a little to the west) of Jerusalem, and about eighty miles from Nazareth.

Verses 41–45. *When Elisabeth heard the salutation, &c.*] It is probable that Mary's unexpected greeting startled Elisabeth, and produced the effect here noted. *Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost*] Her mind became illuminated and her heart gladdened by the divine influence. It was through the operation of this Spirit that she was enabled to address Mary so truly. *Blessed art thou among women*] The very words in which the salutation of the angel was expressed. *And blessed is*

46 And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord.

47 And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

*the fruit, &c.*] Alluding, probably, to the child's being the promised Seed in "whom all the families of the earth should be blessed," *Psa. lxxii. 17.* *Whence is this, that the mother of my Lord, &c.*] An expression of humility—Why is it that the mother of my Lord should come to me, as if to honour me? If by the expression, "my Lord," Elisabeth meant a mere man, how was it any condescension that her near relative, the mother of a mere man-child, should come to visit her? But if Mary was the mother of Elisabeth's Lord and Maker, according to the flesh, then was there cause sufficient for her astonishment:—*Venn. Blessed is she that believed, for, &c.*] Or, as it is in the margin, "*that there shall be,*" &c. It has been conjectured, not improbably, that in these words there is a delicate allusion to the unbelief of Zacharias.

Verses 46, 47. *Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord*] To "magnify" is to *extol*, to *celebrate*, to *account great*. In this hymn the Virgin pours forth her mingled emotions of joy, gratitude, and humility, in language very much resembling that of Hannah, the mother of Samuel, in her song of thanksgiving for his birth. *1 Sam. ii. 1-10.* Her expressions denote the greatest earnestness and intensity of feeling. *My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour*] The word rendered "rejoice" imports, also, *exultation*—the highest state of joy. By "God my Saviour," Mr. Wesley supposes her to mean the Christ, and that the phrase expresses her hope of salvation through him. Although so highly honoured as to be the mother of the Saviour, Mary was as much dependant on him for salvation as is the veriest sinner.

48 For he hath regarded the low estate of his hand-maiden : for behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

49 For he that is mighty hath done to me great things ; and holy is his name.

50 And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.

51 He hath showed strength with his arm : he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

52 He hath put down the mighty from *their* seats, and exalted them of low degree.

53 He hath filled the Hungry with good things ; and the rich he hath sent empty away.

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Verses 48, 49. *He hath regarded*] Or, looked favourably on—in the most tender and compassionate manner. *The low estate, &c.*] *The lowly condition*,—for though of the royal family of David, she occupied an humble rank in society : her poverty is evidenced by her purification offering. Luke ii. 24. Her *humility*, it is supposed, may also be included in the term, though in a secondary sense. The Lord has ever a gracious regard to the lowly-minded. *All generations shall call me blessed*] The word here rendered “blessed” does not signify honour, much less religious homage, but simply happiness ; it should have been translated *happy*. *He that is mighty*] Meaning God. *Hath done to me great things*] Hath bestowed on me wonderful benefits. The reference is perhaps chiefly, though not entirely, to the miraculous conception. *And holy is his name*] The “name” of Jehovah is frequently, as here, put for himself. Mr. Watson says, “This [phrase] may be taken imperatively, ‘Let his name be hallowed and most deeply revered.’”

Verses 50–53. *His mercy is on them that fear him*] Mary here intimates that the benefit to which she had just alluded was not of a private character, nor confined to



few, but that the "mercy" of God in sending the Messiah was a public one, the advantage of which should descend "from generation to generation,"—that is, from one age to another. The "fear" contemplated is not a slavish, guilty fear, but that salutary emotion so called which leads its possessor to reverence and honour the object feared. The reader should bear in mind that all blessings proceed from God, (James i. 17,) who, though "no respecter of persons," has yet a special regard to "them that fear him—that hope in his mercy," because they are those who seek his favour. *He hath showed strength with his arm*] The "arm" is a common symbol of strength or power, and is frequently used in Scripture to express the attribute of omnipotence. Job xl. 9; Isaiah lii. 10. May not this refer to that wonderful display of God's power of which she herself was the living witness and subject? *He hath scattered the proud, &c.*] There is here, probably, reference to the different course taken by the divine Being from that which proud, self-confident persons had marked out, in their imaginings, as to the circumstances of the birth and appearance of the Messiah. "Thus he scatters the proud in"—as to what concerns the thoughts—"the imagination of their hearts;" he dissipated and contradicted all their views and expectations. As God, in the exercise of his sovereignty, confounds the wisdom of the wise, so *he puts down the mighty from their seats, and exalts them of low degree.* Similar sentiments occur in the song of Hannah, and frequently in the sacred songs of the Hebrews. They show how attentive the people were to the divine dispensations, and how familiar they were with the principles on which those dispensations proceeded. One of these is "to hide pride from man," and to bring him to feel and confess his entire dependance

54 He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of *his* mercy ;

55 As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.

56 And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.

upon God. In the way of humility God meets with every man ; in the way of pride and self-sufficiency he resists and spurns him. Thus our Saviour was born among lowly people ; he came to them, and not to the proud, and to this trial worldly-minded men were afterward more fully subjected.—*Watson.* *He filled the hungry—the rich he sent empty away*] “Rather, ‘he filleth,’ &c. ; that is, he bestows abundant mercies and benefits on the poor and needy ; and the rich he [not unfrequently] deprives of their possessions,” though not without sufficient reasons. “Verses 50–53 show that in the course of God’s providence the divine wisdom and power are often manifested in a way quite contrary to the proud notions of man, and yet triumph over all human opposition and perverseness. How applicable is this description of God’s dealings with mankind to the case of the blessed virgin, when, contrary to all earthly ideas of grandeur, Christ condescended to be born of so lowly a parentage !”—*Holden.*

Verses 54–56. *He hath holpen his servant Israel*] The Messiah was promised before Israel existed as a people ; the promise was universal, and made, as to its benefits, to all nations. But he was to appear among the Israelites, an Israelite himself, and to them the first offers of his grace were to be made. Thus by the Messiah God *sent help* to his “servant Israel.” The word rendered “holpen” properly means to *take hold of*, in order to raise up. This

## LESSON IV.      [Date, B. C 5.

*The birth and naming of John the Baptist.*

LUKE i. 57-80.

NOW Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered ; and she brought forth a son.

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was his gracious intention as to the Jews, and to all others. Our redemption is thus effected by the reaching down of the arm of the divine mercy to raise us up from sin, misery, and ruin, and to exalt us to a state of knowledge, holiness, and joy. *In remembrance of his mercy*] That is, in remembrance of his merciful promise to give a Redeemer to the world. Though this promise was long delayed, it had not been forgotten, and now, in the maturity of time, was about to be fulfilled. *As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, &c.*] The promise was originally made to our first parents ; though it was more distinctly expressed to the "fathers" of later date. Abraham is probably particularized, 1st. As being the head of the Jewish nation ; 2d. Because the divine purpose, in this respect, was made known to him in very clear language, and so readily apprehended by his mighty faith, that he prospectively "saw Christ's day, and was glad." *Mary abode with Elisabeth about three months*] At the end of which time she returned to Nazareth. It is probable that she left her relative prior to the birth of John. "That she left her at so critical a time was probably from motives of delicacy ; since such were periods of great bustle, by the extraordinary resort of company to congratulate the mother."—*Bloomfield*

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## NOTES ON LUKE i. 57-80.

Verses 57, 58. *Now Elisabeth's full time, &c.*] On this clause Mr. Henry piously remarks, "Though John

58 And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had showed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her.

59 And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father.

was conceived in the womb by miracle," or at least in a preternatural manner, "he continued in the womb according to the ordinary course of nature. So did our Saviour. Promised mercies are to be expected when the *full time* for them is come, and not before." *Her cousins heard.* &c.] Rather, her *relatives*, without specifying the degree of connection. *The Lord had showed great mercy*] In granting her a son. *They rejoiced with her*] Occasions of this kind were commonly attended, among the Orientals, with many demonstrations of gladness. In the present instance congratulations were, probably, more numerous than usual, on account of the improbability of Elisabeth ever being a mother. To rejoice with those whom God has favoured, and to sympathize with and comfort the sorrowing, are "duties which humanity, charity, and religion call on us to perform." Rom. xii. 15.

Verse 59. *On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child*] The institution of circumcision, as a religious rite, was ordained by the divine Being. It was given by him to Abraham, both as "a token" or visible sign of that "everlasting covenant" which God then made with him, and as "a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had:" (Gen. xvii. 9-11; Rom. iv. 11 :) and in obedience to the divine mandate he and all the males of his house were circumcised. The rite was continued among his descendants without interruption until after their deliverance from the bondage of the Egyptians, but fell into

disuse during the forty years' wandering. Immediately on entering into Canaan proper, the institution was revived, (Josh. v.,) and thenceforward became the initiatory rite of admission into the Jewish church, as baptism is into the Christian. It was therefore performed on all males who became ranked among the people of God, proselytes as well as Jewish born. If the proselyte were a Samaritan, or of any other nation which used the rite, blood was to be drawn afresh from the part circumcised, ere he could be fully recognised as a convert to the Jewish faith; for only circumcised persons were deemed members of that church, and none but these were permitted to participate in the great festivals, particularly the passover. Figuratively, circumcision was, with the Jews, as baptism is with us, an external sign of inward purity and holiness; hence the expressions, "circumcising the foreskin of the heart," "circumcision of the heart," &c. Deut. x. 16; Rom. ii. 29. It was commanded, in the case of male infants, that they should be circumcised on the eighth day, including both the day on which the child was born and that on which he was circumcised; and so scrupulous were the Jews of our Saviour's time of its observance, that if the eighth day fell on Sunday, the sacred rest was set aside, and the ceremony attended to. John vii. 22, 23. The operation was anciently performed with a sharp stone of flint, (Exod. iv. 25; Josh. v. 3,) but latterly with a knife. Women never act as circumcisers, unless men cannot be obtained. It is stated by many learned men and eastern travellers, especially Dr. Russell, the physician of the English factory at Aleppo, that circumcision is, in warm climates, of physical benefit, conducing much to cleanliness and health. "Thus understood, we obtain another illustration of a policy very com-

60 And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John.

61 And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name.

62 And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called.

63 And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all.

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mon in God's dealings with the Hebrews, by which some act, in itself medically or morally useful, is made compulsory, by its adoption for some symbolical or ceremonial purpose. Thus is magnified the wisdom and beneficence of that great God, whose service was never made to require any act hurtful or of no use to his servants."—*Pict. Hist. Palestine.* And they called him Zacharias] They proposed so to have him called. Although it was not *required* that the child should be named at the time of his circumcision, it was always done, probably because God changed Abraham's name when he commanded him to observe this rite. Girls were not named until they were weaned.

Verses 60–63. *He shall be called John*] Signifying the *grace or mercy of the Lord.* John is the name which the angel had said should be given to the child, with which fact Elisabeth had probably been made acquainted by her husband; as she had, doubtless, with all the other particulars of that interview. *Kindred*] Relatives. *They made signs to his father, &c.*] From this circumstance it is generally thought that Zacharias was deaf as well as dumb. *He asked for a writing table*] He "asked" by signs. The "writing table" probably means a writing tablet. It is supposed to have been a small board spread over with a coating of wax, (such being used by the ancients,) and was written or marked on with a style, or

64 And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue *loosed*, and he spake, and praised God.

65 And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill-country of Judea.

66 And all they that heard *them* laid *them* up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him.

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pointed metal pen. "At Karitena (in Greece) it is still usual for schoolboys to have a small clean board on which the master writes the lesson he designs to be read. This instrument is called by the same name as is used in Luke i. 63."—*Hartley's Tour in Greece*. "The boys in Barbary," says Mr. Shaw, "are taught to write on a smooth, thin board, slightly daubed over with whiting. The Jewish children use the same." *Wrote, saying*] That is, wrote the words. *His name is John*] This is not an uncommon name in the Old Testament, though our translators render it Johanan. These circumstances must have occurred prior to circumcising the child, for, as the name was given immediately on performing that act, it must have been determined beforehand what he should be called. *And they marvelled all*] "Marvelled" means, *wondered, were astonished*. Dr. Clarke is of opinion that these words should form the introduction to the sixty-fourth verse, and connect thus: "And they marvelled all, *for*," &c., thus referring the astonishment of the "neighbours and relatives" to Zacharias's recovery of speech, rather than to the wish of both the parents to have the child named John.

Verses 64–66. *His mouth was opened*] That is, he was enabled to speak. By a very expressive figure, a person who cannot speak is said to have his "mouth closed," his "tongue tied," &c., and when the calamity

67 And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying,

is removed, he is, as here, said to have his "mouth opened," &c. Zacharias had been dumb about nine months. *Fear came on all, &c.*] "The word here rendered 'fear' imports a mixed feeling of *wonder* and *awe*." It seems to have been excited by the sudden restoration of the power of speech to one whom they probably regarded as having for ever lost that faculty. *These sayings*] Rather, as in the margin, "*these things*;" including both what was done and said. *Were noised abroad*] Were made public,—being much talked about. The wonderful works of God, especially the manifestations of his mercy and truth, form profitable subjects for conversation; and if engaged in with proper motives, and conducted in a right manner, may do much, as here, toward promoting the glory of the Most High, and the instruction and comfort of our fellows. All men will not profit by such discourse, but many may. *Laid them up in their hearts*] Meditated on these things, and endeavoured to remember them. So David, speaking of his treasuring up in his memory the law of God, says, "Thy word have I hid in my heart," *Psa. cxix. 11.* *What manner of child shall this be*] It seems to have been a general opinion that a child whose birth was attended by such remarkable circumstances, was intended for some great design. *The hand of the Lord was with him*] The word "hand" here denotes protection, favour. We stretch out the hand to aid those whom we wish to help. The meaning is, that the boy enjoyed God's protection and favour in a high degree.

Verses 67–69. *His father prophesied*] To "prophesy" is, 1st. To foretel future events. *Ezek. xii. 27*; 2d. To



68 Blessed *be* the Lord God of Israel ; for he hath visited and redeemed his people,

69 And hath raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David ;

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praise God. 1 Chron. xxv. 1, 3 ; 3d. To teach, under divine influence. 1 Cor. xiv. 1, &c. The first is the more frequent import of the term. Zacharias is here said to prophesy in the sense of the first and second of the above divisions, for he not only poured forth an extemporary hymn of praise to God, but spoke of things to come : for of the future results of the birth of his own child, and of the child of Mary, he makes express and emphatic mention. Now as no one can certainly predict future events save God, it follows that the Holy Ghost, under whose influence Zacharias spoke, is God. *Blessed is the Lord, &c.*] The word here rendered “blessed” is not the same as that so translated verses 42 and 48 ; *this* is correctly rendered blessed. *God hath visited*] The original conveys the idea of looking after, in order to relieve. “God is here said *to visit men* to inquire, as it were, into their situation, and afford them relief or aid. See Exod. iii. 16 ; Ruth i. 6. *And redeemed*] Or, about so to do. To “redeem” is to *ransom*, or buy off. The word is used to express the fine paid for letting loose, or setting free, from the severer penalties of a violated law, and is here employed to express deliverance from sin and its consequences. The redemption-price, whereby this deliverance is effected, is constantly declared, in the Holy Scriptures, to be the death of Christ,—he dying in our stead : “The Son of man came to give his life a *ransom* for many,” Matt. xx. 28 ; “Who gave himself a *ransom* for all,” 1 Tim. ii. 16 ; “In whom we have redemption, through his *blood*,” Eph. i. 7 ; “Ye were not redeemed

with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the *precious blood of Christ*," 1 Pet. i, 18, 19. *A horn of salvation in the house of David*] This allusion to the family of David shows that Zacharias is not speaking of his own son, who was of the house of Aaron, but of the son of Mary, though yet unborn. The metaphor of the horn is probably taken from horned animals, whose chief instrument of attack or defence is their horns: so David calls God (Psa. xviii. 2) "the horn of salvation," that is, the instrument of deliverance. The "horn" is a frequent symbol of strength, power, authority; and is therefore used in the sacred writings as the emblem of sovereignty. Jer. xlviii. 25; Dan. viii. 20-22; Rev. v. 6. It is possible, however, that the whole figure may be taken from the Jewish altar of burnt offerings. On each of the four corners of this altar there was an eminence, or small projection, called a horn. This altar was considered a place of refuge; and persons guilty of certain crimes (for instance, unintentional murder) might flee to it, and by seizing hold of its horns, were considered to place themselves under the protection of God, and were safe from the avenger of blood. So the Redeemer *may* be called "the horn of salvation," as being a secure refuge to all who flee to him. The sense probably is, And hath raised up for us a Saviour sovereign; a new power springs from the decayed and fallen house of David, and a mighty potentate appears, whose office is to save, not to destroy; who puts down by his might all our spiritual enemies, and becomes our Almighty friend, refuge, and benefactor. Zacharias seems to have supposed that this "horn of salvation" was "raised up" for the sole benefit of the Jewish nation; this opinion was in accordance with the views of almost all the Jews. We, however, know that Christ

70 As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began ;

71 That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us ;

72 To perform the mercy *promised* to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant,

73 The oath which he sware to our father Abraham,

74 That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear,

75 In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.

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is not the Saviour of the Jews merely, (John x. 16,) but that "in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him," Acts x. 35. Reader, how is the account with thee ?

Verse 70. *As he spake by—his prophets*] The original promise was given by God himself, (Gen. iii. 15,) probably in the person of the Son. It is a common saying of the Jews, that all the prophets prophesied of the Messiah; (see Acts x. 43;) that is, he was the prominent subject of prophecy. In the list of these "prophets" the ancient patriarchs should be included: Adam, as the depositary and teacher of the first prophetic promises; Noah and Abraham, as transmitters of this important knowledge; and Jacob, as adding to it a more explicit declaration than had yet been known. *Which have been since the world began*] That is, from the earliest times. The text does not mean that "prophets," strictly so called, have existed from the beginning of the world, but that predictions concerning the future Saviour commenced immediately after the fall, and were continued so long as God employed prophets to announce his messages to men.

Verses 71–75. *That we should be saved from our enemies, &c.*] This verse connects with the sixty-ninth; the

seventieth should, therefore, be read in parentheses. The salvation spoken of is certainly a spiritual one, for Christ did not deliver the Jews from their political adversaries and oppressors, the Romans. This salvation is effected, not for Israel only, but for the whole world. The "enemies" and "haters" spoken of are our own sinful passions Satan and his angels, and wicked men. From all these evils Christ came to deliver us. Compare Matt. i. 21 with 1 John iii. 8. The "*hand* of them that hate us," means, as before, the *power*. *To remember his holy covenant*] The usual import of the word "covenant" is, a compact or agreement made between two or more parties, wherein each party binds itself to the observance of such stipulations as may be agreed on. Such was the case at Sinai, when the people solemnly assented to all the requirements of God, and promised to obey them. The "covenant" to which reference is here made is, as appears from the next verse, that promise which God made to Abraham at the time he offered up Isaac, that the Messiah should be born of his descendants, and is recorded Gen. xxii. 16-18. It differs from the above definition in that Abraham, so far as we are informed, made no promise, for himself or others, to perform any acts, or yield observance to any requirements. The obligation was altogether on the part of Deity. This shows that the word "covenant" is sometimes, in Scripture, applied to a mere promise of one party. *The oath which he sware, &c.*] The meaning is, "The covenant confirmed by the oath which he sware," &c. *That we might serve him without fear, &c.*] The blessedness which it was predicted should come upon "all the families of the earth," is interpreted by Zacharias, speaking under a divine influence, to consist in being delivered from the power of spi-

76 And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest : for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways ;

ritual enemies, and being privileged to “serve God without fear”—without any bondage—“in holiness and righteousness ;” that is, with renewed and purified affections, exhibited by all suitable external fruits, whether of piety, justice, or mercy. In this the true felicity of man consists, and it is by being raised into this high and glorious state of moral deliverance, that we are blessed in the seed of Abraham. “Before him” means, in his sight—therefore in true and real holiness.

Verse 76. *And thou, child*] Zacharias had, hitherto, been speaking of our Saviour ; in this and the following verses he predicts the dignity and employment of John. *The prophet of the Highest*] “The Highest,” here, is Christ himself. John was Christ’s prophet, not only as sent by him, to declare his will, but as he [John] predicted the almost immediate manifestation of his Lord, discoursed on his glorious character and the design of his coming, and pointed him out as the only object of trust to guilty men. *Thou shalt go before the face, &c.*] To “go before the face” of one, means to go *just* before—to be followed *immediately* by him. *To prepare his ways*] This he did by his public ministry, which was eminently successful in *preparing* men, by repentance, to turn to God. “The terms of this passage,” says Mr. Watson, “are an unequivocal proof of the Messiah’s divinity. ‘And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of *the Highest*, for thou shalt go before the face of *the Lord*, to prepare *his* ways, to give knowledge of salvation to *his* people,’ &c. Thus He whose ways were prepared by John, and who beyond

77 To give knowledge of salvation unto his people, by the remission of their sins,

78 Through the tender mercy of our God ; whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us,

all objection was Jesus, is called *the Highest, the Lord*, and the Jews are styled *his people*."

Verse 77. *To give knowledge of salvation, &c.*] As to "give wisdom" is to make wise, so to "give knowledge" is to make to know—to instruct. *By the remission of sins*] "Remission" means forgiveness, pardon. "John not only taught repentance, but the true nature of salvation,—of that salvation which Messiah was to give. He taught that it consisted in the 'remission of sins,' and the restoration of truly penitent and believing persons to the favour of God and the hope of a better life. Of the spiritual character of John Baptist's teaching, we have proof in the conclusion of one of his discourses, (John iii. 36,) 'He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life : and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life ; but the wrath of God abideth on him.'"—Watson.

Verses 78, 79. *The day-spring from on high hath visited us*] Commentators differ as to who is meant by the "day-spring:" some (and among them Dr. A. Clarke) apply the expression to John, others to Christ. The weight of authority, however, is in favour of referring the words to the Saviour. Mr. Watson remarks, that the word rendered "day-spring" not only signifies sunrise, "but comprehends the whole, from the dawn to the burst of the orb of day ; and the term *day-spring* was happily chosen by our translators, inasmuch as the Saviour here spoken of was not indeed at that time actually born, but upon the point of being so." *To give light to them that sit in darkness*] The figure of the preceding verse is still

79 To give light to them that sit in darkness and *in* the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

80 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel.

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continued, Christ being represented as coming to dispel the darkness or ignorance of sin, as darkness is dissipated by the beams of the rising sun. To “sit” means to *be*. *Shadow of death*] This is a forcible image, conveying the idea that the moral darkness, or spiritual ignorance and misery, of those to whom Christ had come to dispense “light,” was so great as to be aptly compared to the darkness and dreariness of the grave. Can more expressive language be chosen? It is probable that by “them that sit,” &c., the inhabitants of Galilee are particularly meant, (see Isa. ix. 12, and Matt. iv. 13–16,) though the figure is no less applicable to all the human race who are without the light of the gospel. *To guide our feet into the way of peace*] Mankind are here represented under the notion of a wandering traveller, bewildered in darkness, and about to fall into destruction, (of which death is a frequent image,) when lo! the rising beams of the “Sun of righteousness” burst upon his pathway, he discovers his imminent peril, and turns his feet into the “way of peace”—the road which leads to peace and safety. Well may the ways of religion be denominated the “path of peace,” for she yields peace—deep peace, peace with God—to her votaries here, and the end of the way brings “quietness and assurance for ever.” My dear reader, are you in possession of this blessing?

Verse 80. *And the child grew*] The evangelist here speaks of John. He increased in stature and bodily vigour. *And waxed strong in spirit*] To “wax” is to

grow, to increase. "The word 'spirit' here has respect both to the mind and the heart, to the intellectual and the moral qualities. As John advanced in age, he also gave evident proofs of a strong mind and a pious heart."—*Ripley*. *And was in the deserts*] It may be presumed that John would continue, at least during youth, to reside at home; probably then, however, mixing as little as could well be with society; for he seems to have been fond of retirement. When arrived at sufficient age to choose his own mode of life, his parents, probably, being dead, he appears to have separated himself still more from intercourse with the world, and sought the solitude of the desert, living on fruits, locusts, and wild honey, and clothed in the simplest manner. Thus retirement was, in all likelihood, necessary and beneficial to him; as he would thus be preserved from having his mind warped by the false notions of the Jewish teachers, and would, in that seclusion, approach near unto God, and seek that guidance of the Holy Spirit which was necessary to enable him to be the herald of the Messiah, and the introducer of his gospel. The word "desert," here, is supposed to denote a part of the country but thinly settled, as the Jews used both the terms "desert" and "wilderness" to express an uncultivated, thinly settled district, as well as a barren waste. This "desert" is supposed to have been that of Judea, in which John began to preach, (Matt. iii. 1,) and is described by Mr. Horne as "a mountainous, wooded, and thinly inhabited tract of country, but abounding in pastures; it was situated adjacent to the Dead Sea and the river Jordan. In the time of Joshua it had six cities with their villages. Josh. xv. 61, 62. It is now one of the most dreary and desolate regions of the whole country." *Till the day of his showing unto Israel*]



## LESSON V.      [Date, B. C. 5.

*An angel appears to Joseph—Birth of Christ at Bethlehem—Angels appear to certain shepherds—Circumcision of Christ.*—MATT. i. 18-25; LUKE ii. 7-21.

MATT. i. 18-25.

**N**OW the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

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Meaning, until he entered on his public ministry, which was when he was about thirty years of age, that being the period fixed for priests' entering on the public duties of their office. Compare Num. iv. 3 with Luke iii. 23.

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## NOTES ON MATT. i. 18-25.

Verse 18. *Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise*] The events here noticed took place at Nazareth. For the meaning of the name "Jesus," see note on Luke i. 31, p. 62. The Greek word *Christos*, or Christ, is of the same import as the Hebrew word *Messiah*, and signifies *the anointed*. What first gave rise to the term was the ceremony of anointing, by which the kings and high priests of the Jews, and sometimes the prophets, (1 Kings xix. 16,) were consecrated and admitted to the exercise of their holy functions. As this consecration was considered as adding a sacredness to their persons, it served as a guard against violence, from the respect had to religion. Its efficacy this way was remarkably exemplified in the time of David, who acknowledges, that when he had it in his power to avenge himself of Saul, who sought his life, he was, by this consideration chiefly, restrained

from killing him: "The Lord forbid," said he, "that I should do this thing unto my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch forth my hand against him, *seeing he is the anointed of the Lord*," 1 Sam. xxiv. 6. The word here translated anointed is, in Hebrew, *Messiah*, and in the Greek of the Seventy, *Christ*. It was a term, therefore, in its original use, applicable to all the succession of kings and high priests of the people of Israel. The term was also employed, in a figurative sense, to denote those specially favoured of God, as were the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, concerning whom Jehovah is represented by the psalmist as having said, "Touch not mine anointed," Psal. cv. 15. But the most eminent use of the word is its application to the Redeemer of mankind—the Lord of God's people. David represents Jesus as anointed king, Psal. ii. 2; Isaiah, as set apart and consecrated to be the messenger of good tidings, chap. lxi. 1, &c.; and Daniel, as appointed to make expiation for the sins of the people, chap. ix. 25, 26. In the last quotation the word is translated *Messiah*. The reader will thus perceive that the term "Christ" is, properly speaking, a title of office, and ought, therefore, to have the article *the* prefixed to it, particularly in such passages as Acts xvii. 3; xviii. 5, and xviii. 28. This word, however, came at length, from the frequency of application to one individual, and only one, to supply the place of a proper name. What would contribute to hasten this effect was the commonness of the name Jesus among the Jews at that time, which rendered an addition necessary for distinguishing the person. It is therefore supposed that in process of time the name Jesus was very much dropped, and "Christ," which had never been used before as the proper name of any person, and was, for that reason, a

19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.

better distinction, was substituted for it, insomuch that among the heathen our Lord came to be more known by the latter than the former.—*Campbell*. “On this wise” means, in the following miraculous manner. “Espoused,” betrothed, promised in marriage; see note on Luke i. 27, p. 58. *With child of the Holy Ghost*] The human nature of our blessed Lord was formed by the creative energy of the Holy Spirit, in the womb of the virgin Mary. He was thus free from the taint of sin, which no other human being, since the fall of our first parents, ever was.

Verse 19. *Joseph, her husband, being a just man*] Joseph is here called the “husband” of Mary, although not actually married to her, because betrothal was regarded as marriage in *fact*, though not in form. The usual meaning of the phrase, “a just man,” is, one who deals fairly and honestly with others; but here it probably denotes that Joseph was a strict observer of the law of Moses—a religious man. For a somewhat similar use of the word see Luke xx. 20. *Not willing to make her a public example, &c.*] The Jewish law ranked unfaithfulness in an espoused person, at least in a woman, with adultery, and decreed that the guilty party should die by stoning. John viii. 4, 5. Joseph, however, though a “just man,” and therefore one who regarded the precepts of the law, was “not willing”—that is, did not feel inclined—“to make her a public example,” (meaning, expose her to the public gaze,) by declaring her guilt before the whole community. He could not, however, as a “just man,” receive Mary as his wife; he therefore chose another course which the Jewish law allowed, namely, to

20 But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS; for he shall save his people from their sins.

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“put her away privily,” or privately, by delivering her a bill of divorce in the presence of two subscribing witnesses, without assigning any reason for his conduct. Among the Jews divorces did not require a judicial process, as they do with us; but a husband could put away his wife when he would, by giving her a writing of divorcement. Not even the formality of witnesses was required by law, though the later rabbins insisted on this, and it finally became an established custom. The notions of modern Jews are equally lax on this subject.

Verses 20, 21. *While he thought on these things*] While he turned them in his mind, not fully decided, perhaps, how to act. *The angel appeared unto him in a dream*] In the age of the patriarchs, as well as during the era of Judaism, God often revealed his will by dreams, not only to his own people the Jews, but to persons of other nations. These dreams were not, however, common dreams, for as they were supernaturally induced, so they were accompanied by an internal evidence, sufficient to satisfy the mind of the dreamer, that they were of a supernatural character. Although dreams of this kind are now by no means frequent, (probably there is less need of them, on account of a complete written revelation of God's will being given to man,) there is reason to believe that still, at times, Jehovah speaketh to man “in visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon him.” The use

22 Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,

23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which, being interpreted, is, God with us.

or abuse of this doctrine will, however, depend upon the state of mind. For the import of the word "angel," see note on Luke i. 11, p. 42. *She shall bring forth, &c.*] See on Luke i. 31, pp. 61-63.

Verse 22. *All this was done that it might be fulfilled, &c.*] This is not the language of the angel, but of Matthew. The things referred to are the miraculous conception, and the circumstances attendant thereon. "We are not to understand that the end of Christ's being born of a virgin was to fulfil the prediction; for if these things were done *to fulfil the prophecy*, it follows that if the prophecy had not been given, the events would not have come to pass. Whereas, the prophecy was given because God had determined on the thing. The prediction declares that a certain event would take place; and the evangelist assures us that the very event spoken of by the prophet was the birth of Jesus Christ of the virgin Mary; in other words, that not only did an event take place to which the words of the prophet *might* be applied, but that the very circumstance had transpired to which it was designed they *should* be applied."

Verse 23. *Behold, a virgin, &c.*] "This illustrious prophecy was delivered by Isaiah, (chap. vii. 14,) in the reign of Ahaz, king of Judah, when he and his people were under great apprehensions that the state would be subverted by the invasion of the confederated kings of Israel and Syria. God by the prophet promises deliverance to Ahaz, who appears to have been utterly distrustful in

24 Then Joseph, being raised from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife ;

25 And knew her not till she had brought forth her first-born son : and he called his name JESUS.

the message of God, and in this spirit to have refused to ask a sign, which the prophet had desired him to do. This Ahaz did, secretly trusting in the help of his ally, the king of Assyria, rather than in the Almighty ; but covering his unbelief with a pretence of not being willing to 'tempt the Lord.' Upon this the prophet turns to the people, and says to them, 'The Lord himself shall give you a sign ; behold,' &c. This was a 'sign' to them, as it was the utterance of a new prophecy and assurance respecting the coming of Messiah ; and it was a 'sign' or pledge, also, that the house of David, the kingdom of Judah, should not then be destroyed, and thus it was an encouragement to them" in their distressed situation.—

*Watson.* Here, as in many other passages of the sacred writings, deliverance from a present temporal affliction is typical of deliverance from those greater evils induced by sin. *They shall call his name Emmanuel*] Meaning, *he should be Emmanuel*, which, says the inspired writer, is—that is, signifies—*God with us* ; or God and man united in the same person. Such *was* and *is* our blessed Saviour—the God-man ; and if he had not been God incarnate, he could not have been a Saviour.

Verses 24, 25. *Then Joseph took unto him his wife*] Satisfied that she was innocent of the crime of which he had thought her guilty. We should learn from Joseph's example speedily and cheerfully to obey God, both when-ever and in whatever he commands. *Her first-born son*] The first child, if a son, was, among the Jews, called the

## LUKE ii. 1-21.

1 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.

2 (*And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.*)

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first-born, whether any more sons were born afterward or not. It has been much disputed whether Mary ever had any more children, but the Holy Spirit has not seen fit to satisfy man's curiosity in that particular; and it is a matter of no consequence.

## LUKE ii. 1-21.

Verses 1, 2. *In those days*] Meaning about, or shortly after, the birth of John the Baptist, though before that of our Lord. *There went out a decree from Cesar Augustus*] A "decree" is an edict or law commanding a thing to be done. The "Cesar Augustus" here spoken of was the second Roman emperor, and nephew of Julius Cesar. His *real* name was Octavius, but, on being adopted by his uncle Julius Cesar, he assumed the royal name of Cesar. On his accession to the throne, about twenty-nine years before the Christian era, he took the title of Augustus, as expressive of the character of peace and sanctity which he uniformly affected. Augustus was, therefore, a personal distinction, Cesar a royal name. In process of time, however, both appellations came to be indifferently used to denote the reigning emperor. See Acts xxv. 21. *That all the world should be taxed*] The phrase, "all the world," properly signifies the inhabited parts of the earth; such, however, cannot be its meaning here, as "all the world" was not subject to Cesar's sway.

The clause cannot, at the utmost, include more than the Roman empire; and many learned men are strongly of opinion that nothing more than the kingdom of Judea is meant. By the word "taxed" it is generally allowed that a mere enrolment or census of the people is intended. The word is so rendered in the margin. *This taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria*] This verse has occasioned much perplexity, because Cyrenius, or Quirinius, did not become "governor" or president of Syria until about eleven years after the birth of our Saviour. The difficulty is, how to reconcile this historical fact with the account of Luke. To accomplish this, some commentators render the clause, "This was the first enrolment of Cyrenius, (afterward) governor of Syria." Now as St. Luke wrote his gospel many years after Cyrenius became governor, he might very naturally speak of him as *the governor*, although not such at the time the event narrated took place; just as we say *General Washington* was distinguished for his good conduct in the old French war, though he was then but a major, not being made general until many years subsequent to that war. Others translate the passage, "This enrolment was *before* Cyrenius was governor of Syria;" Dr. Clarke favours this method of interpretation. A third mode of rendering is, "This enrolment first *took effect*—that is, was first carried into execution—when Cyrenius was governor of Syria." Mr. Holden says, "The original Greek is obscure, if not corrupt: but any of these renderings, *which it certainly admits*, is sufficient to meet the difficulty, and to free the evangelist from the charge of so gross a mistake as that of confounding the enrolment in the reign of Herod with the taxation several years after by Cyrenius." The most satisfactory explanation which has met



the eye of the compiler is that which Dr. Hales has offered, and of which the following is a condensed statement, copied from the Pictorial Bible. The reader will perceive that it agrees with the third mode of interpretation above offered. "Herod the Great, toward the latter part of his reign, incurred the displeasure of Augustus, in consequence of misrepresentations of his conduct having been made at Rome. The emperor wrote to him a very sharp letter, to the effect 'that having hitherto treated him as a friend, he should now treat him as a subject.' In consequence, Herod suffered several indignities, the chief of which was the degrading his kingdom to the rank of a Roman province; for soon after, Josephus mentions that 'the whole nation took an oath to Cesar and the king jointly.' The date of this transaction coincides with that of the decree of enrolment mentioned by St. Luke. The Roman census required a return of every person's age and property, under penalty of confiscation of the goods of the delinquent. The reason for registering ages was, that among the Syrians, males from fourteen years of age, and females from twelve, until their sixty-fifth year, were subject to a poll tax, by the Roman law. Cyrenius, a Roman senator, and procurator or collector of the emperor's revenue, was employed to make this enrolment.\* At this juncture, however, the census proceeded no further than the enrolment of persons in the Roman registers; for Herod, having by his trusty minister, Nicholas of Damascus succeeded in undeceiving the emperor, Augustus be-

\* Justin Martyr, in his first Apology, addressing himself to the emperor and senate, alludes to this event in these words: "You may assure yourselves (of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem) from the census made in the time of Cyrenius, *your first procurator in Judea.*"

3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, (because he was of the house and lineage of David,)

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came reconciled to Herod, and the operation of the decree was suspended. But *eleven* years afterward it was carried into effect, when Archelaus, son and successor of Herod the Great, was deposed from the government of Judea, and that country annexed to Syria as a Roman province. Acts v. 37. At this time Cyrenius *was* president of Syria, and it may be fairly presumed that it is to this taxing St. Luke alludes in his parenthetical clause." "Syria," as existing at that time, probably embraced the country extending between the Euphrates on the east and the Mediterranean on the west, Palestine on the south, and, perhaps, Cilicia on the north. Palestine is now annexed to Syria.

Verses 3, 4. *Every one went to his own city*] That is, to the place from which his family had sprung—what we should term his own township. The people seem to have been enrolled by families. *Galilee—Nazareth—Judea*] See on Luke i. 26, pp. 57, 58.

Bethlehem, the birth-place of the Messiah, is called in Scripture "Bethlehem Ephratah," Micah v. 2, "Bethlehem-judah," Ruth i. 1, and "Bethlehem of Judea," Matt. ii. 1, to distinguish it from another Bethlehem which belonged to the tribe of Zebulun. Josh. xix. 15. It is situated on the summit of a steep hill, about six miles south-east from Jerusalem. The sides of the hill have been formed into terraces, which are planted with the fig-tree, the olive, and the vine. The soil around it is generally fertile, and the situation of the place would be agreeable,

if the country over which it looks were brought under cultivation, or planted with trees. The valley around it is not large, nor is the hill upon which it stands very elevated, as it is in what is called "the hill-country of Judea," (Luke i. 65,) and is surrounded by several other hills of nearly the same elevation.

There are many interesting associations connected with the village of Bethlehem. It was in its neighbourhood that the patriarch Jacob buried his beloved Rachel, and set up a pillar which for ages after served to mark the place of her sepulture. Gen. xxxv. 19, 20 It was the scene of the transactions related with so much simplicity and beauty in the book of Ruth. Among the hills of Bethlehem the sweet singer of Israel tended his father's flock, (1 Sam. xvi. 11,) and here were heard the soft tones of his harp, and the glad breathings of his voice, as he called upon all creation to praise the name of the Lord. At the front of the hill, facing the north, is "the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate," to which David's "mighty men" fought their way through the garrison of the Philistines, and drew out the water for which he longed.

Bethlehem presents, at a distance, a rather imposing appearance. Dr. E. D. Clarke, when he visited it, merely rode through the town, making no stay, on account of the plague, with which it was then infected. He says, "It appeared to be a larger place than we expected to find: the houses are all white, and have flat roofs, as at Jerusalem, and in other parts of the country." The most conspicuous object in Bethlehem is the convent, built over the reputed site of the nativity. In the time of Volney, Bethlehem contained six hundred men capable of bearing arms; later travellers describe it as containing from twelve to fifteen hundred inhabitants.

5 To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

6 And so it was, that while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

7 And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

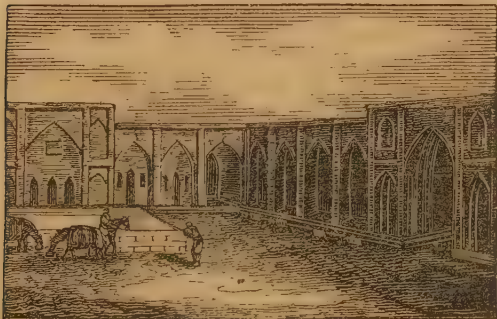
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Verse 5. *To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife*] It is suggested that Mary is here called the "espoused wife" of Joseph, because she was to him only as one betrothed. Matt. i. 25. Some commentators are of opinion that there was no legal necessity for Mary to go to Bethlehem, but that God so ordered it, that the prophecy of Micah (chap. v. 2) should be fulfilled. Others, on the contrary, urge that the text indicates that Mary was an heiress, however small her patrimony might be, and that consequently she was obliged to attend and enrol herself. Indeed, it is by no means improbable, not only that Joseph and Mary were enrolled, but that the name of Jesus was also entered on the register.\*

Verses 6, 7. *First-born son*] See on Matt. i. 25. This child was Jesus our Saviour, who came into the world "to save sinners." 1 Tim. i. 15. *Wrapped him in swaddling clothes*] "Swaddling clothes" were the bandages in which newly-born infants were formerly swathed or enwrapped, to strengthen their frames and prevent distortion. Bloomfield says, "This practice was not peculiar to the ancients, but prevailed in this country [England]"

\* The emperor Julian the Apostate says: "The Jesus whom you extol was one of Cesar's subjects. If you make a doubt of it, I will prove it;—for you say yourselves that *he was enrolled with his father and mother*, in the time of Cyrenius."—*Calmet's Dictionary*, art. Cyrenius. Also, Watson's Dict.

until the last century." *And laid him in a manger, because there was no room in the inn*] The "inns" of oriental countries bear no resemblance to the comfortable and frequently elegant establishments so denominated among us. An eastern inn, or caravansary, as it is commonly termed, is a four-sided building, enclosing an area or courtyard, to which access is gained through a large gateway. The appearance from the outside is simply that of four high walls, forming a square, or nearly so. On entering the court, the traveller perceives that a number of small recesses, separated from each other by partitions, are ranged on each side. Toward the rear of each



recess there is usually a small unfurnished lodging room, to which access is gained by a door, the key of which is handed to the traveller by the keeper of the caravansary. The sole occupancy of that particular room, and of the recess in front of it, is thus secured, for the time being, to the individual having possession of the key. Besides these private apartments, (consisting of the recess or porch, and lodging room,) there is usually, in the centre

of one or more of the sides of the quadrangle, a large and lofty hall, where the temporary occupants of the "inn" may meet for conversation or entertainment. The floor of these apartments—the recesses, rooms, and halls—are raised two or three feet above the level of the court, upon a platform or bank of earth, faced with masonry. In the centre of the court is a well or cistern, affording to travellers that most essential of conveniences in a warm climate, pure water. Many caravansaries are without stables, the cattle being accommodated in the open area. But the most complete establishments have very excellent stables, in covered avenues which extend *behind* the ranges of apartments—that is, between the back walls of the before mentioned buildings and the external wall of the khan; the entrance to these stables is by a covered passage at one of the corners of the quadrangle. The stable is on a level with the court, and consequently below the level of the buildings by the height of the platform on which they stand. Nevertheless, this platform, being allowed to project some distance behind into the stables, forms a kind of bench, to which the horses' heads are turned, and on which they rest the nose-bags of hair cloth out of which they feed, when the contents get low. It is also often the case, that not only does the platform thus project into the stable, but also recesses, similar to those in front, are formed by the partition walls which divide the rooms being allowed to project behind into the stable, just as the projection of the same walls into the great area forms the recess in front. These stables thus furnish tolerable accommodation for the servants who have charge of the cattle; and often, when persons find, on their arrival, that the rooms usually appropriated to travellers are already occupied, they are glad to find accom-

modation in the stable, particularly when the nights are cold, or the season is inclement.

“Now in our opinion,” observes the editor of the Pictorial Bible, from whose minute description the above is chiefly extracted, “the ancient or the existing usages of the East supply no greater probability than that the Saviour of the world was born in such a stable as this. Not knowing that there were *stables* to oriental caravansaries, some recent writers, of great information and ability, have concluded that our Lord was born in a place distinct from, and unconnected in any way with, the ‘inn’—probably in a shed or outhouse—perhaps in a cave.” The word rendered “manger” has given rise to much discussion as to its true import. The common opinion of the learned is, that it means a *stable* or *stall* for cattle; and it was here that the holy child Jesus was born, as well as afterward laid. “This being the case,” remarks the writer above quoted, “it is evident from our description, that the part of the stable could not reasonably have been other than one of those recesses, or at least a portion of the bench, which we have mentioned as affording accommodation to travellers under certain circumstances. The explanation here given was strongly suggested to the writer’s mind while himself finding accommodation in a recess of such ‘stables’ when there was ‘no room’ for him in the proper lodging apartments of caravansaries.” According to this view, the “inn,” from which Joseph and Mary were excluded by the crowd of visitors, was the proper sleeping apartments of the caravansary, and the “manger” or stable in which they found a temporary resting-place was that portion commonly assigned to the cattle and servants of travellers. It should be borne in mind that it was not owing to *poverty* merely

8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

9 And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid.

that the holy family were thus situated, but because the better apartments were already occupied on their arrival.

Verse 8. *There were in the same country*] That is, in the neighbourhood of Bethlehem. *Shepherds abiding in the field*] A "shepherd," strictly speaking, is a keeper of sheep, as the name, sheep-herd, denotes. Other cattle, however, particularly goats, usually made a part of his care. "There is no intimation here that these shepherds were exposed to the open air. They dwelt in the fields where they had their sheep penned up, [at night,] but they undoubtedly had tents or booths under which they dwelt."—*Clarke. Keeping watch over their flock by night*] Literally, "keeping the night watches over their flock," as in the marginal note. The night was divided, by the Jews of our Saviour's time, into four watches, and the shepherds probably relieved each other at these changes; thus a part of them would be constantly on duty. This "watching" was necessary to guard the flock against marauders and beasts of prey.

Verse 9. *The angel, &c.*] More properly, "*an angel.*" *Came upon them*] Burst suddenly upon their sight, as supernatural appearances usually do. The original is supposed to intimate that the angel stood *over*, or above them, in the air. *The glory of the Lord shone round about them*] That is, surrounded the shepherds. The phrase, "glory of the Lord," is by some commentators understood to be a strong expression for *a great glory*—an exceeding bright light; others, however, believe the lan-



10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not ; for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

guage to import that "the glory" manifested on this occasion was "a streaming forth from the divine shechinah, the light in which the special presence of God has ever been inshrined ; in which it appears to dwell in the heaven of heavens ; and by which it was so often manifested on earth."—*Watson*. Dr. A. Clarke suggests that the rays of glory proceeded from the angel, "as the rays of light are projected from the sun." The second supposition seems most plausible. *Sore afraid*] Greatly terrified. Feelings of terror would naturally be excited by such an appearance ; and it may be they feared he was a messenger of justice, not of love.

Verse 10. *The angel said—I bring you good tidings*] "Tidings" means *news, intelligence* ; "good tidings," good news. *Of great joy*] That is, which shall cause great joy. *Which shall be to all people*] Professor Ripley says, "More properly, to all the people, that is, to the whole Jewish nation." Whether this be the true rendering of the angel's language or not, it is certain that these tidings of salvation were meant, ultimately, not for the Jews only, but for all people ; and the time will come when

"Earth's remotest nation

Shall learn Messiah's name "

May that time speedily arrive ; then shall "his way be made known upon earth, his saving health among all nations."

Verse 11. *Unto you is born this day*] The precise date of Christ's birth is unknown ; we may therefore assuredly

conclude that it is a matter of little moment. By different learned men it has been assigned to every month in the year. One thing, however, seems almost certain, namely, that this event did not take place on the twenty-fifth of December, as the Romish Church asserts it did. Jewish writers state that it was usual for that people to send out their flocks to be pastured, under the care of shepherds, about the time of the passover, and to keep them out until the first rains, when they were brought home. Now as the shepherds were still out with their flocks, it is reasonably concluded that the fall rains had not yet commenced, and therefore that the date could not be later than the close of our October or the early part of November, at which time these rains commenced. Again, as the passover was the period when they *sent out* their flocks, it is highly probable that the nativity of Jesus cannot be placed earlier than March. The true date of Christ's birth is therefore, in all likelihood, somewhere between the first of March and the early part of November. Yet, though it may not be possible to fix on the exact date of this glorious event, it is highly proper that the Christian church should observe *some day* in commemoration of Christ's birth, and the twenty-fifth of December will answer as well as any other time. *In the city of David*] This appellation is generally given, in Scripture, to that portion of Jerusalem originally called Zion, situated in the south-western part of the city, the name of which was changed to "the city of David" on its being taken from the Jebusites, and made the seat of David's court. 2 Sam. v. 9. In this passage, however, as well as in Luke ii. 4, the designation is applied to Bethlehem, on account of David being born and brought up there. *A Saviour, which is Christ the Lord*] The word "Saviour"

12 And this *shall be* a sign unto you ; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

means *one who saves*—a deliverer. It is applied to Jesus Christ because he saves those that truly believe on him from the condemnation, pollution, and punishment of sin. For the import of the term “Christ,” see note on Matt. i. 18, p. 91. The word “Lord,” in this place, is expressive of Christ’s divinity—it is said to mean the same as Jehovah.

Verses 12–14. *This shall be a sign, &c.]* The word “sign” frequently means a miraculous event, given as *confirmation* or *proof* of the truth of something claimed or said :—such was the dumbness of Zacharias. The term seems to be here employed as a direction to the shepherds how to distinguish the child Jesus. *A multitude of the heavenly host, &c.]* The word “host” properly denotes an army : the expression here means that a multitude of angels suddenly presented themselves, who instantly commenced praising God.

“In heaven the rapturous song began,  
And sweet seraphic fire  
Through all the shining legions ran,  
And strung and tuned the lyre.  
Swift through the vast expanse it flew,  
And loud the echo roll’d ;  
The theme, the song, the joy was new,  
’T was more than heaven could hold.”

*Glory to God in the highest]* This phrase seems to have a double meaning. It is, 1st. Such an expression of thanks-

giving or praise to God for the wonderful manifestation of his mercy in the gift of his Son as we may well conceive would fill the bosoms of such holy, benevolent agents as the "heavenly host" are ever represented to be.

2d. A declaration of that "glory" or honour which should accrue to God from this event. "In the highest" probably means in the highest heavens, being an accommodation to the Jewish notion of three heavens, (2 Cor. xii. 2,; namely, the aerial, the starry, and the place where the divine presence is peculiarly manifested—the residence of God and of his holy angels. "The design of God, in the incarnation, was to manifest the hidden glories of his nature, and to reconcile men to each other and to himself. The angels therefore declare that this incarnation shall manifest and promote the glory of God, not only in the highest heavens, among the highest order of beings, but in the highest and most exalted degrees."—*Clarke. Peace on earth*] That is, to man. "Peace," with the Hebrews, was a comprehensive phrase, including all manner of spiritual and temporal blessings. All these benefits are received by mankind through the mediation of Christ, who is in consequence called "our peace," the "prince of peace," &c. This clause, as well as the former one, may be understood both in the sense of an earnest wish and of an affirmation. *Good will toward man*] The divine honour being guarded, and justice satisfied, by the mediation of Christ, the Deity can now, without injury to his own character, or abatement of his claims, dispense those benefits to man which his nature—his benevolence, prompts him to put forth. In the phrase, "good will," are included all those acts of benevolence and love which God displays, or ever will display, to man, in time and in eternity. The exclamations of the angels are broken into

15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

16 And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

17 And when they had seen *it*, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

18 And all they that heard *it* wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

19 But Mary kept all these things and pondered *them* in her heart.

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short sentences, as the rejoicings of a multitude would naturally be.

Verses 15-17. *As the angels, &c.*] Rather, *when*, or as soon as the angels were gone away. *Unto Bethlehem*] Called by the angels, verse 11, "the city of David," where Jesus then was. It is probable that these shepherds were pious men, who gladly received intelligence of the birth of the Messiah, and hastened to assure themselves of the fact. *Came with haste*] Let us be in equal haste to evidence our faith in the things recorded of Christ, by making instant individual application for a participation in their benefits. *Found Mary—and the babe lying in a manger*] Or stall, meaning, probably, in the stable of the caravansary. *They made known the saying*] That is, the declaration of the angel concerning him, as recorded in verses 10, 11, together with the result of their visit to Bethlehem. Thus these shepherds became the first human publishers of the gospel. Their zeal should be imitated by all who find Christ.

Verse 19. *Mary kept all these things*] From this it would seem that the shepherds had told Mary all the par-

20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

21 And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

particulars of the angels' visits, and that she carefully treasured up the intelligence. *And pondered them*] To "ponder" is to revolve or think deeply on—to weigh in the mind. Here is a delicate and beautiful expression of the feelings of a mother. It may reasonably be supposed that Mary reflected with intense interest on these remarkable circumstances, comparing them with the intimations given her by the angel Gabriel, which intimations were in some sort a clew to their meaning. Thus she saw the plans of the divine Being opening before her, though not without mysterious, and probably, for a time, unaccountable occurrences, which threw her back upon those deep musings which appear to have characterized her.

Verse 20. *The shepherds returned*] Namely, to their flocks—to their business as shepherds. *Glorifying and praising God, &c.*] They glorified him by praising him,—to glorify being to praise, to exalt, to honour in a public manner. From this it seems clear that the shepherds believed the testimony of the angels, that the "babe of Bethlehem" was "Christ the Lord." It is possible, however, that they had very faint, if not mistaken views of his character, probably regarding him more as a *temporal* than as a *spiritual* saviour or deliverer.

Verse 21. *When eight days were accomplished, &c.*] Not eight full days, but on the eighth day. For notice of the rite of circumcision, see *on* Luke i. 59, p. 78. Our

Lord, being "made under the law," was circumcised ; for, as a descendant of Abraham according to the flesh, he was, *as a man*, bound to observe all the religious institutions which had been enjoined on the Jews. Without submitting to this rite, he could not have claimed the privileges of a member of the Jewish church.

In this lesson we see how the prophecies of the Old Testament were accomplished by circumstances apparently accidental. No mortal wisdom could have foreseen the results of this journey of Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, and the consequent fulfilment of the prediction of Micah, which the Jews had long referred to as an undoubted prophecy of the birthplace of Christ. Nay, it was against all human probability, for doubtless Mary herself expected her holy offspring would be born at Nazareth. Yet Cesar Augustus is made the unwitting instrument of fulfilling the design of God, and by enacting a decree which made it obligatory on Joseph, and probably equally binding on Mary, to go to the ancient residence of their family, the word of God is made to stand fast. The lesson also shows how unnecessary to true excellence, and to dignity in the sight of the Lord, is earthly greatness. The highest worth of character, and the fullest enjoyment of the divine favour, may be possessed by those whose external circumstances are abject. Then let us not place our affections on wealth, but seek, as the one thing supremely worthy our pursuit, the approval and love of God.

## LESSON VI. [Date, B. C. 5.

*The purification—Presentation of Christ in the temple, where he is acknowledged by Simeon and Anna.*

LUKE ii. 22-38.

AND when the days of her purification, according to the law of Moses, were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present *him* to the Lord ;

23 (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord ;)

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NOTES ON LUKE ii. 22-38.

Verses 22, 23. *When the days of her purification, &c.]* "Purification" means cleansing. By the Mosaic law a woman was declared to be ceremonially defiled by childbirth, which defilement continued, after the birth of a male child, until the fortieth day, and of a female child until the eightieth day. Lev. xii. 2-5. During the whole of this period she could not attend on the public celebration of God's worship. At the expiration of that time, however, she was privileged to visit the temple at Jerusalem, or any other sanctuary. The modern Jews have abolished the distinction of time between the birth of a son and of a daughter, and limited the separation to forty days in each case.—*Allen. Accomplished]* Fulfilled, ended. *They brought him to Jerusalem]* They brought Jesus, now, probably, forty days old. *To present him to the Lord]* The words, "to present," here mean, *to offer*. The law given through Moses required that every first-born male, both of man and beast, should be devoted to God. Exod. xiii. 2. It was therefore accounted "holy," or *consecrated*—that is, set apart as his property—for his service. Shortly after the enactment of this law, the Lord made choice of the tribe of Levi to serve him in the



24 And to offer a sacrifice, according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons.

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priesthood, and other duties of the sacred office, instead of the first-born of each family. Num. iii. 12. To keep up, however, a lively recollection of the original design of the institution, (the preservation of the first-born of the Israelites when those of the Egyptians were destroyed, Exod. xiii. 12-15,) it was required that the first-born should still be presented to the Lord, but that they should be redeemed by the payment of five shekels, or about two dollars and a half of our currency, which money was appropriated to the benefit of the priesthood. Num. xviii. 15, 16. It was by the payment of this money that Jesus was redeemed. This law is still observed by the Jews.

Verse 24. *And to offer a sacrifice, &c.*] The law (Lev. xii. 6, 8) required that the mother should offer a lamb for a burnt offering and a turtle dove or young pigeon for a sin offering. In case, however, she were too poor to procure these sacrifices, she might offer a turtle dove or a young pigeon for a burnt offering, and another for a sin offering. As Mary presented the birds, to the exclusion of the preferred sacrifice, there can be no reasonable doubt that she and Joseph were of the poorer class of the people. While the Israelites remained in the wilderness, it is probable that the women brought the required offering immediately after their period of separation had expired; but when they were settled in Palestine, and many families lived at a distance from the tabernacle or temple, it may be presumed they were allowed to consult their convenience on this point. After the birth of Samuel, his mother, Hannah, did not go to the tabernacle until the child was weaned, probably two and a half or three years

25 And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name *was* Simeon; and the same man *was* just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him.

26 And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

after his birth. 1 Sam. i. 21. It is urged that the poverty of Mary's offering indicates it to have taken place prior to the visit of the magi, and the enriching the holy family with the presents brought by them.

Verse 25. *A man whose name was Simeon*] It has been suggested by some that this excellent man was the son of Hillel, a famous teacher of the Jews, and president of the sanhedrim; and the father of Gamaliel, instructor of Paul. If such had been the case, it is not likely that Luke would have suppressed so honourable a fact: there is no good foundation for the opinion. *The same man was just and devout*] "Just" here means *upright*, and "devout," *religious*—devoted to God. He was a person of integrity and uprightness, discharging faithfully his obligations to men, and circumspectly performing the duties he owed to God. *Waiting for the consolation of Israel*] Meaning, the consoler of Israel, an appellation applied by the Jews to the expected Messiah. Simeon and other spiritually minded persons, knowing that the time specified by Daniel (ix. 24) was about fulfilled, were now "waiting for," or confidently expecting the coming of, their long-promised deliverer. *The Holy Ghost was upon him*] Not merely in an ordinary way, as upon all good men, but in the spirit of prophecy. He was inspired.

Verse 26. *It was revealed unto him*] To "reveal" is to make known; in a theologica' sense, the term is gene-

27 And he came by the Spirit into the temple : and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law,

28 Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,

29 Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word :

30 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,

rally used to denote the making known that which could not have been learned but by the direct agency of the Almighty. Before the establishment of the Israelites in the land of Canaan, the will of God was usually “revealed” to men in visions or by dreams, though occasionally by angelic ministers ; afterward, generally, by the inspired writings or by prophets. Mankind are now, for the most part, left to regulate their conduct by the canon of Scripture, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the dictates of an enlightened conscience. *That he should not see death, &c.*] That is, that he should not die. *The Lord’s Christ*] His Anointed—the Saviour.

Verses 27, 28. *By the Spirit*] Under the influence of the Holy Ghost—by his suggestion or impression. *Into the temple*] The inner court of the temple, called the court of Israel. *The parents brought Jesus, to do for him, &c.*] Meaning, to redeem him, by the payment of the specified amount of money. *Blessed God*] Thanked or praised him.

Verses 29, 30. *Now lettest thou, &c.*] Now thou dost let. This is not the expression of a wish or desire, but a declaration of assured permission. *Depart in peace*] The word rendered “depart” means to *let loose*—to *let go*; and conveys the idea of freedom from prior detention, so that now the individual is at liberty to return to the place

31 Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people ;

32 A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

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he longed to be at. To “depart *in peace*” signifies in happiness, with all desires gratified. *According to thy word*] The promise made him by the Holy Ghost, as stated verse 26. *For mine eyes have seen thy salvation*] Meaning, the Author of salvation. “Salvation” is, by some, thought to be an appellation of the Messiah ; (Gen. xlix. 18 ; Isa. xlix. 6 ;) and that he is so called as being the cause of that deliverance of man from sin and its consequences which is proffered in the gospel. The word “for,” here, has the sense of *because*. The aged saint had been detained from the heavenly rest that he might behold the Christ in the flesh. Being satisfied, by the illumination of the blessed Spirit, that the child whom he now took in his arms was the long-desired object of his dearest hopes, he welcomes the sight as a gracious token of his dismissal from the trials and anxieties of a probationary state to the blissful rewards of the paradise of God. “Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright ; for the end of that man is peace,” *Psa. xxxvii. 37.* May such be ours also !

Verses 31, 32. *Prepared before the face of all people*] “Prepared” means provided, or made ready ; and “before the face,” probably, denotes that this “salvation” was provided for all people. See *Isa. lii. 10 ; Luke iii. 6.* “Here,” says Dr. A. Clarke, “salvation is represented under the notion of a feast, which God himself has provided for the whole world, and to partake of which he has invited all the nations of the earth. There seems a direct allusion here to *Isa. xxv. 6* : ‘In this mountain shall the

33 And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him.

Lord of hosts make unto all people a *feast of fat things*, &c. Salvation is properly the food of the soul, by which it is nourished unto eternal life: he that receiveth not this, must perish for ever." *A light to lighten the Gentiles*] The term "Gentiles" is here used to denote all people excepting the Jews. This language of Simeon seems to be an allusion to Isa. xlix. 6, where Jehovah is represented as saying to the Messiah, "I will give thee for a light to the Gentiles," &c. The Gentiles are depicted as being enveloped in darkness, and Christ as being sent to give them light. This he did by both his instruction and example, and this he now does by imparting unto men the Holy Spirit, through whose influences they may be reclaimed from sin and ignorance, just as their minds are ordinarily enlightened by the instruction of a faithful and competent teacher. Blessed be God, many have received the "light," and it is still spreading; but more, many more, are still in the darkness of nature, "living without God and without hope in the world." These it is our duty—*your* duty, reader—to endeavour to save, by sending them the gospel; and we ought to exert ourselves to the utmost in this labour of love. *Glory of thy people Israel*] "Glory of Israel," here, probably means that which shall be accounted by them their highest honour. If so, then the period will arrive when "Jesus of Nazareth" will be as much honoured by the Jewish people as he is now despised. The descendants of Abraham have been highly honoured of God; their greatest glory, however, is, that the Saviour of the world was of their nation.

Verse 33. *Joseph and his mother*] That is, the mother of Jesus. *Marvelled*] Were greatly astonished at the

34 And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this *child* is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against;

35 (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

things spoken by Simeon. From this it would appear that even Mary did not fully understand the office and character of her son. Perhaps she was particularly amazed at his being "a light to the Gentiles."

Verses 34, 35. *Simeon blessed them*] Probably prayed for God's blessing to rest on Joseph and Mary. *Said unto Mary, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel*] The word rendered "set," in this passage, means *appointed*, as it is translated 1 Thess. iii. 3. See also Phil. i. 17. His being "set" or appointed for the "fall" or "rising" of many, is not, however, to be regarded as implying fatality or predestination, but simply that the manner of his appointment, the meanness of his birth, the spirituality of his doctrines, the constant denial of self they required, &c.—so opposite to all that the majority of the Jews of that age looked for in their Messiah,—would lead "many in Israel" to reject him, and finally to accomplish his death, in consequence of which they would "fall" under the severe condemnation of God, and wrath to the uttermost come upon them. It thus appears that the language has reference to the foreseen *effect* of Christ's coming. The words, "rising again," would have been better rendered, *rising up*; for "rising again" intimates that the same persons who fell, afterward rose, which was not certainly the fact. The "rising" spoken of is probably that elevation of moral character which is imparted to every true believer through faith in Christ, by the pos-

session of which he acquires a claim to an inheritance at God's right hand. Every Jew, when Christ came, had the choice placed before him, to "fall" by unbelief, or to "rise" by faith; and wherever Christ is preached, the same alternative is still proffered to every individual. Reader, it is made to *thee*; O, embrace Christ as thy portion! Dr. A. Clarke is of opinion that the term "fall" has reference to the desolations inflicted on the Jewish nation by the Romans, and the word "rise" to the ultimate gathering in of the Jewish outcasts with the believing Gentiles. [The compiler of this work at one time entertained the same opinion, but he has since changed his views: hence the discrepance between the present note and the question book.] *And for a sign which shall be spoken against*] The word "sign" sometimes, as here, denotes a conspicuous or distinguished object. This the Lord Jesus was. His claims to divinity—his public teaching and amazing miracles—and, above all, his shameful death—have conspired to render him a very public "sign." He has, too, ever been spoken against by the wicked and the unbeliever. The "cross" or religion "of Christ" is still to the Jews "a stumbling block," and, to a great majority of the Gentiles, "foolishness." Even during his lifetime his most benevolent actions were calumniated, and ascribed to Satanic influence, and his sublimest lessons of wisdom and of the purest morality declared to be the ravings of a madman. Matt. ix. 34; John x. 20. And all this, because they were disappointed in their ambitious dreams of universal monarchy. How rancorous is the enmity of the human heart! how deep its moral pollution! *Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul*] The word "soul" here means *mind*. Mental anguish is often compared to the infliction of wounds on the

36 And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser : she was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity ;

37 And she *was* a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.

body, by sharp-pointed weapons. Prov. xii. 18. The language forcibly predicts those agonized feelings which the mother of Jesus endured when she heard the aspersions cast upon his character by his malicious enemies, and especially when she saw him hang, and heard him reviled, on the cross. Compare John xix. 25 with Mark xv. 29-32, and Luke xxiii. 35, 36. *That the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed*] Rather, "so that," &c., intimating that thus men's real dispositions would be "revealed," or made to appear. Nor has any thing ever so opened the moral state of the heart of man, or thrown such light upon the governing principles of human nature, as the introduction of Christianity into the world.

Verses 36, 37. *One Anna, a prophetess*] In what sense Anna is called a "prophetess" is not clear ; perhaps the term only implies that she was wont to speak, or instruct, by a divine impulse,—one sense of the verb "to prophesy" being "*to teach doctrines, to instruct by the suggestion of the Holy Spirit.*" *Tribe of Aser*] That is, Asher ; one of the sons of Jacob and Zilpah. "Though in the time of Christ the distinction into tribes was not throughout observed, yet individual families and persons retained the knowledge of their descent."—Ripley. *Seven years from her virginity*] That is, she had lived with her husband seven years from the time of their marriage, when he died. *She was a widow of about fourscore and four*



38 And she, coming in that instant, gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

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*years*] “Fourscore and four” are eighty-four. It is disputed whether she had been thus long a widow, or whether she was about eighty-four years old. Most commentators favour the latter opinion. *Departed not from the temple*] This does not mean that she was there all the time, but, that she was in the constant habit of being present at all the *stated* services, and at most, if not all, occasional ones. The regular or stated services of the temple were at the time of the morning and evening sacrifices, or at about nine o’clock (of our time) in the forenoon and three in the afternoon of each day. *Fastings and prayers night and day*] To “fast” is either to abstain from all food during a specified time—usually from the time of rising in the morning until after sunset,—or abstinence, that is, receiving less nourishment than usual; this latter is sometimes called partial fasting. These “fastings” and “prayers” have, probably, allusion to private as well as public religious duties. Exercises of the kind here mentioned are doubtless very beneficial to the Christian, greatly aiding him in acquiring a proper command over his natural appetites, as well as having a tendency to incite the soul to closer communion with God. We must not, however, forget that no such rites can atone for sin; and that therefore we ought not to confide in them. The blood of Christ alone, applied by the Holy Spirit, can save from the pollution and punishment of sin. The phrase “night and day” means, probably, that she spent a considerable part of the night, as well as of the day, in the performance of religious duties.

Verse 38. *She, coming in*] Into the court where

Joseph, Simeon, Mary, and Christ then were. She joined them, apparently, while Simeon was ascribing glory to the Almighty for the gift of the Messiah. *Gave thanks likewise*] That is, joined in offering praise. This she did probably in an inspired prophetic composition, similar to that of Simeon, "giving thanks" for the birth and presence of the Messiah, whom she also must have recognised by a direct revelation from the Holy Spirit. *Spake of him to all them that looked for redemption*] "Looked for" means *expected*, and "redemption," the Redeemer. She informed those that expected the Messiah that he had come. It is suggested that she communicated the intelligence of the Redeemer's birth by going from house to house among those pious Jews who entertained correct ideas of the nature of the redemption which Christ came to effect. It seems, from the pious worthies here brought before us, and the allusion to others of similar character contained in the words, "them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem," that there was a pious remnant there looking out with desire and confidence for the manifestation of the great salvation of God. These persons formed, at that time, the true spiritual church of the Jews. It is supposed that during the following thirty years their number, not now large, became greatly lessened, and that when John the Baptist appeared in his public character, there were but few left who were truly devoted to God.

## LESSON VII.      [Date, B. C. 4.

*Visit and offering of the Magi—The flight into Egypt—Slaughter of the children at Bethlehem—The return from Egypt, and settlement at Nazareth.*

## MATT. ii. 1-23.

**N**OW when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

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## NOTES ON MATT. ii. 1-23.

Verse 1. *Now when Jesus was born*] This does not mean *at the time* of his birth, but a while after. *In the days of Herod*] See sketch of Herod's history in note on Luke i. 5, p. 35. Our Saviour was born in the beginning of the last year, or near the close of the last year but one, of Herod's reign. *There came wise men from the east*] The word here rendered "wise men," is *magoi*, and is supposed to have been the name of a sect of philosophers, for which reason these persons are sometimes called magi, or magians. They are thought to have been a class of learned men much given to the study of astronomy, natural philosophy, and other sciences calculated to improve their minds and to extend their knowledge of the works of the great Creator. Some writers think them to have been believers in the true God. Learned men differ as to what particular country they came from, the term "east" being very indefinite; though the majority are of opinion that they came from Arabia, which country not only lay to the east of Judea, but was also early distinguished for the superior intellectual acquirements of its inhabitants. Jer. xlix. 7.

2 Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

Verse 2. *Where is he that is born King, &c.*] It is recorded in history, that at about the time of our Lord's birth, a very general expectation prevailed in the world, but especially in the East, that a great king was about to arise in Judea. Suetonius and Tacitus, two Roman historians, make mention of this fact, as do also Josephus and Philo, two Jewish writers. It is supposed that this expectation had its origin in the prophecies contained in the Jewish sacred writings, which prophecies, by the dispersion of the Jews into almost all parts of the then known world, but particularly the East, had become well known. *We have seen his star in the east*] Meaning that they, when in the east, had seen the star—namely, to the *west* of them, for they had come from the east. This “star” is called “his,” as indicating the time and place of his birth. The nature and appearance of this mysterious object cannot be determined; though it is probable that it was a luminous body, somewhat resembling a star. The design of its manifestation must have been revealed to these magi, for how else could they have inferred that it denoted the birth of the “King of the Jews?” “The sign was, however, appropriate, as among the ancients the appearance of a star was considered the forerunner of the birth of a great prince. By them, also, bright meteors, having a stellar [starlike] appearance, were denominated stars.”—*Watson*. *And have come to worship him*] The term “worship” does not always mean divine adoration, or such homage as is rendered to God; for when our translation of the Bible was made, the word was used to express an act of reverence paid either to the divine

3 When Herod the king had heard *these things*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

Being or to man. Neither does the original point out the nature of the worship which the magi had come to render. It is generally supposed that these "wise men" had not a correct knowledge of Christ's true character, and that the service paid him by them was merely that kind of obeisance which is usually rendered to kings and other chief magistrates, and which in the East consisted in prostrating the body almost to the ground. It is reasonable to infer, either that the magians had, until very recently been guided in their journey by the "star," whose beams seem to have been now withdrawn, as no longer needed, or, that they had been, in some other way, supernaturally directed to Judea. Arrived at that country, they would very naturally make for the metropolis, especially as the court and temple were there, and, in the absence of more immediate direction, make inquiry among the people for the object of their search. By this means, also, another and very public proof would be given to the Jews that God had graciously visited his people.

Verse 3. *When Herod heard these things*] Meaning, heard of the arrival and inquiry of the strangers, their account of the star, and the design of their visit. *He was troubled*] He felt uneasy in mind, fearing that the kingdom would be lost to him or his children. Herod was a man of a very suspicious and vindictive nature, which unhappy dispositions strengthened as he grew older. He was also a very ambitious man, fond of power. He knew, too, that the Jews both feared and hated him, and that they would be glad to be freed from his tyranny. When, therefore, he heard that a "king of the Jews" had been born, he would naturally be greatly "troubled," lest the

4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

people should revolt from under his rule. *And all Jerusalem with him*] “Jerusalem” is here put for the people—the inhabitants of Jerusalem. But why were *they* troubled? Some suppose, lest Herod, hearing of the inquiry of the magians, should adopt cruel measures against the people. Others think they were “troubled” on account of a tradition that had obtained among them, that at the coming of the Messiah severe afflictions,—as famine, earthquakes, revolt, &c.—would come upon them. It is not improbable, however, that the emotion spoken of was rather a feeling of great anxiety to know whether or not the long expected and earnestly desired Messiah had indeed come.

Verse 4. *Gathered all the chief priests and scribes*] That is, probably, so many of them as were members of the sanhedrim, or great council of the nation, for this is supposed to be the body Herod convened. The term “chief priests” is supposed to include not only the high priest for the time being, (for at this period the office was not held during life, as was formerly the case,) but also those distinguished persons who had held this office, as well as the heads of the twenty-four courses into which the priests were divided. The “scribes,” as the title imports, were the transcribers, or copyists, of the Jewish sacred books, and other records; they were also the principal expounders of the law, whence they are sometimes called “lawyers.” They are generally allowed to have been of the tribe of Levi. Such of them as were members of the sanhedrim were chosen to that honour; and from their being the most learned men of the nation, they are sup

5 And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea : for thus it is written by the prophet,

6 And thou Bethlehem, *in* the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda : for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

posed to have been possessed of extensive influence. The word "scribe," therefore, does not denote a religious sect, as the terms Pharisee and Sadducee do, but a class or order of men. *He demanded of them where Christ should be born*] From this it would seem that Herod understood the inquiry of the magians to refer to the Messiah, although they did not ask for the person whom they were in search of by that title, but simply inquired for him that was born king. If Herod did so understand them, then it follows that he was acquainted with the prediction respecting the Christ, and that all he now wished to know was, *where he should be born*, probably that he might strike the blow, which he seems already to have contemplated, with the greater probability of success.

Verses 5, 6. *In Bethlehem of Judea*] So called to distinguish it from another Bethlehem in the tribe of Zebulon. Josh. xix. 10, 15. For a notice of "Bethlehem of Judea," see note on Luke ii. 4, pp. 100, 101. *Thus it is written, &c.*] Namely, in Micah v. 2. *And thou, Bethlehem, art not the least, &c.*] The reader will observe that this language is not exactly the same as that spoken by Micah, which reads thus : "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, *though* thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me *that is* to be ruler in Israel." The want of agreement may be accounted for, either by supposing that the sanhedrim or Matthew designed to give but the *substance* of the prophecy, (as the only point wanted to be proved was the place of

Christ's birth,) and therefore did not attempt to quote literally; or, by reading the original prediction interrogatively, thus, "And thou, Bethlehem, art thou little?" equivalent to saying, thou art *not* little, or, as Matthew has it, not the least, which mode of translation the Hebrew, it is said, will well bear. In support of the former solution it may be urged that the whole prophecy is not quoted, affording a strong presumption that the *general import* only was regarded; and in corroboration of the latter view, that the words *though* and *yet* are not in the Hebrew, and that the rendering here suggested agrees with Matthew. The phrase, "thousands of Judah," is certainly equivalent to "princes of Judah," for the Jewish tribes were formerly divided into "thousands," &c., over whom chiefs or leaders were appointed, here denominated "princes." 1 Sam. x. 19; xxiii. 23. See also Judges v. 15. By Bethlehem not being the "least," &c., is probably intimated the glory with which it should be invested as the birthplace of Jesus. *A Governor, that shall rule*] "Governor" means ruler; and the word rendered "rule" imports that he should govern his people as a shepherd manages his flock,—providing for and protecting them. This is the characteristic of a good ruler. Isaiah also (ix. 6, 7) speaks of Christ as a "ruler," as do some other of the prophets. These predictions were delivered about seven hundred years before the birth of Christ. "This prophecy of Micah," says Dr. Hales, remarking on the entire prediction, "is perhaps the most important single prophecy in the Old Testament, and the most comprehensive, respecting the personal character of the Messiah. \* \* \* It carefully distinguishes his human nativity from his eternal generation; foretels the rejection of the Jews



7 Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found *him*, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

for a season, their final restoration, and the universal peace destined to prevail throughout the earth."

Verse 7. *Herod—privily called the wise men*] "Privily" means *privately, secretly*. He invited them to a private interview, without the knowledge or concurrence of the sanhedrim, being desirous of obtaining from the magians some further information. *Inquired of them diligently*] The word rendered "diligently," means *accurately, exactly*. He wished to know precisely at what time the star was first seen by them. But why did he inquire thus minutely? Because he would reasonably infer that the appearing of the "star" had an intimate connection with the birth of the child, whose real age he might thus find out.

Verse 8. *He sent them to Bethlehem*] Informing them, doubtless, of the prediction of Micah, and of the interpretation of the sanhedrim. *Go and search diligently*] "Diligently" has here its usual signification of *carefully, industriously*. *Bring me word*] Herod took all possible means to obtain accurate information respecting the child; for he not only ascertained the probable time of his birth, and the place where he was born, but he sent the "wise men" that they might see the child, and bring him strict word, that he might know just where to find him. *That I may come and worship him also*] The term "worship" has the same sense here as in verse 2, which see. It is very evident, from the character of Herod, his

9 When they had heard the king, they departed; and lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

close questioning the sanhedrim and the magians, and his subsequent conduct, that he had no intention of seeking the child to "worship" him, but to put him to death. To prevent suspicion, however, he sought to conceal his design under the show of great zeal for the honour of the newly born "king of the Jews." How prone men are to forget that there is One whom they cannot deceive, but to whom even the most secret thoughts are known. *Psa. cxxxix. 2; Jer. xvii. 10.*

Verse 9. *When they had heard the king]* That is, when they had received his direction and charge. *They departed]* To go to Bethlehem. *The star went before them, till it came, &c.]* For some remarks on the probable nature and design of this star, see note on verse 2. By its "going before them," and finally "standing over the place" where Jesus was, it would seem, 1st. That this luminous body was visible in the daytime, as we cannot suppose the magians left Jerusalem in the night. 2d. It could not have been at any very great elevation, for if it had, the particular place where "the young child was" could not have been distinguished. 3d. That it was a sure guide. It should not be forgotten, however, that the word and Spirit of God are now equally certain guides to the Saviour, and that whoever will be led by them shall be infallibly guided into all peace.

Verse 10. *When they saw the star]* Namely, on leaving Jerusalem. *They rejoiced with exceeding great joy]*

11 And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshipped him : and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts ; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh,

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Why ? Because they felt assured that they were under heavenly guidance, and should meet with success in the object of their visit.

Verse 11. *When they were come into the house*] It is thought that Joseph's family were now better accommodated than they were when our Lord was born, and no longer obliged to put up with the shelter of a stable. The time *when* this visit was paid cannot now be positively ascertained, though there is strong probability that it was not until after the presentation of Christ in the temple. As the holy family were now at Bethlehem, it may be reasonably inferred that on leaving Jerusalem, after the purification, they returned to Bethlehem, and that while there the magians called on them. St. Luke, indeed, seems to assert that on quitting the holy city Joseph and his wife returned to Nazareth ; (chap. ii. 39 ;) but it is evident that there is here an hiatus in Luke's narrative, as he omits all the circumstances which took place between the presentation and the final settlement at Nazareth, *after* the return from Egypt, which events are noted by Matthew only. *They fell down and worshipped him*] Paid Jesus homage by prostrating themselves to the earth, after the custom of their country. *Opened their treasures*] The word rendered "treasures" means the things in which their presents were packed, not the gifts themselves. *Gold, frankincense, and myrrh*] It may be asked, Why did they offer gifts, and especially *such* gifts ? They offered gifts because it then was, and still is usual in the

East, whenever people come into the presence of kings or other great men, to make them presents. Thus Jacob sent presents to Joseph, Gen. xliii. 11; and the queen of Sheba brought gifts to Solomon, 1 Kings x. 2. The reason why *such* things were offered probably was, first, Because they *may* have been the products of their own country; secondly and chiefly, Because such articles were ranked among the most valuable, and therefore best suited to be given to a "king." "Gold" is the most precious of metals. It appears to have been known to the earliest races of men, and to have been esteemed as much by them as by the moderns. It is not found in the ore, as most metals are, but in the metallic state, either pure, or combined with other metals. When pure, it is soft and flexible, and may be exposed for ages to air and moisture, or kept in a state of fusion, in open vessels, without change. It was supposed to be imperishable in its nature, until recent experiments in chymistry discovered that, when intensely ignited by means of electricity or the oxy-hydrogen blowpipe, it burns with a greenish-blue flame, and forms an oxyde, which is dissipated in the form of a purplish powder. Gold coins usually contain about one twelfth of copper, which gives to them a reddish tint.—*Covel's Dict. Bible*. For a slight notice of "frankincense" and of "myrrh," see note on Luke i. 9, pp. 39, 40. When the magians visited Christ they "presented gifts," in token of respect; how shall we manifest our sense of his greatness and love? Should we not yield up ourselves to him, saying,

"Take my soul and body's powers;

Take my memory, mind, and will;

All my goods, and all my hours;

All I know, and all I fee'.

12 And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

13 And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise,

All I think, or speak, or do :—

Take my heart, but make it new.”

Verse 12. *Being warned—in a dream*] The magians had evidently intended to return to Jerusalem and acquaint Herod with the residence of the infant king. God, however, instructed them by a dream not to do so, and seems to have directed them to take a different route in their homeward journey. This he probably did, 1st. To thwart the designs of Herod in seeking to make the wise men the instruments, in part, of accomplishing his diabolical project of putting the young child to death; and, 2d. To secure the safety of the magians themselves; for it is highly probable that Herod, having gained from them all the information in his power,—perhaps employed them as guides to his assassins, under the plea of honouring Christ,—would not have hesitated to put them to death, under the plea that they were encouraging treason among his subjects by proclaiming and acknowledging among them another king. 3d. That by the delay occasioned by Herod’s waiting the return of the eastern sages, time might be afforded for both the holy family and the magi to get beyond his reach. We thus see how utterly futile are all plans devised to counteract the designs of the Almighty, and how watchful is his providence over the interest and safety of those that are obedient to him.

Verse 13. *The angel*] Or, “an angel.” *Appeared to Joseph, &c.*] It is presumable that these supernatural

and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

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manifestations took place soon after the arrival of the "wise men" at Bethlehem; for as that town was but two hours' journey from Jerusalem, Herod would soon expect their return; and would not be likely to wait long. *Flee into Egypt*] Egypt was at this time a Roman province, notwithstanding which a great many Jews had taken up their abode there, and were privileged with the free exercise of their religion. It lay south-west from Bethlehem, distant probably from sixty to eighty miles. By retiring to Egypt, Joseph would be beyond Herod's jurisdiction, and yet might be among his countrymen. He was, too, by the kind providence of God in sending the magi with such rich presents, enabled to procure the necessaries of life by their timely liberality. It is remarkable that this is the only time at which our Saviour is known to have been out of Palestine, and this was in the land where the children of Israel had suffered so much and so long under the oppression of the Egyptian kings. The very country which was the "house of bondage" to the seed of Jacob, became now the land of refuge and safety for the newly-born king of Israel. *Until I bring thee word*] That is, continue there until I bring thee word what further to do. Thus, when God grants special direction to his people, he makes known no more than is needful for present comfort or safety, that he may teach them confidence in and dependance on himself. *Herod will seek the young child, &c.*] Here was a new trial of the faith of Joseph and Mary. What solicitude would fill that maternal bosom, on learning that so vin-

14 When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt ;

15 And was there until the death of Herod : that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

dictive, unprincipled, and powerful a monarch was plotting the destruction of her babe's life !

Verses 14, 15. *By night, &c.*] “By night,” to conceal his departure ; and *the very night* of his receiving the vision, to show his ready obedience.—*Bloomfield.* *Until the death of Herod*] This event is supposed to have taken place within twelve months from the flight into Egypt. Greswell, in his Dissertations, fixes it at about seven months thereafter. *That it might be fulfilled, &c.*] Rather, thus was fulfilled, &c. *Out of Egypt have I called my son*] This language is quoted from Hosea xi. 1, and primarily alludes to the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. The prophet, in pleading with the Israelitish nation to abolish their idolatrous rites, and to return to the worship and faith of the true God, urges upon them, as a reason why they should do this, the tokens of gracious regard which the divine Being had manifested to their nation, and depicts Jehovah as a tender parent, and the Jewish nation (including both the kingdom of Judah and that of the ten tribes) as his beloved son. In this character of a father the Most High is represented as saying, “When Israel was a child, [young in national existence,] then I loved him, and” on account of this love, “called,” or delivered, “my son out of Egypt,”—namely, by the instrumentality of Moses and Aaron. The evangelist, by applying these words to Christ, seems to consider the Israelites a typical people, emblematical of Jesus Christ, which view is perhaps coun-

16 Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men.

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tenanced by Exod. iv. 22, 23, and Isaiah xlix. 3, and their residence in Egypt prefigurative of his. In accordance with this notion, Greswell makes the duration of our Lord's abode in Egypt to be about as many days as the Israelites sojourned years—namely, two hundred and fifteen. Hosea's language seems, therefore, to have conveyed more than a mere declaration of God's love, being a prediction that as "Israel," his adopted son, had been called out of Egypt, so also should "Israel," his only-begotten son; and that in his return the prophecy should be fully accomplished.

Verse 16. *Mocked of the wise men*] The word "mock" now means to *mimic*, to *imitate with contempt*; formerly it meant to *treat disrespectfully*, to *trifle with*, or *deceive*. Herod was "mocked of the wise men" by their not returning, as he expected they would; they thus disappointed or deceived him. *Wroth*] Angry—*very* angry. *Slew all the children in Bethlehem*] That is, all the *male* children, of the age hereafter mentioned. As his object was to destroy his supposed rival, the newly-born "King of the Jews," we may reasonably conclude he would not injure females, from whom he had nothing to fear. Besides, the original implies that male children only were killed. Herod, by this conduct, violated that law of God which says, "Thou shalt do no murder." *And in all the coasts*] The term "coast," or "coasts," is by us usually applied to land bordering on the sea—the sea-coast; here,



however, the word has the sense of *neighbourhood*—"he slew the children in Bethlehem and the neighbouring places." *From two years old and under*] Commentators are not agreed as to the import of this phrase; some arguing that it includes only those children who were just turned of one year, say thirteen months old, down to perhaps four or six months of age:\* others think that all male children whose age did not *exceed* two years were embraced in the horrid slaughter. Holden says, "The Greek may be rendered, 'slew all the male children from a full year old and under.' The reason of Herod's limiting the massacre to *any* specific age probably was in consequence of the information he had obtained of the magians, as to the time the star appeared. The number of children thus cruelly murdered is variously estimated at from twenty to fifty. The truth of this massacre has been questioned by some, because Josephus, the Jewish historian, makes no mention of it. It is urged in reply, 1st. That the silence of one historian as to any particular fact cannot be a valid objection against it, when it is mentioned by another historian of equal veracity; and certainly Matthew is as good authority for any historical fact he mentions as Josephus. 2d. Josephus acknowledges that he took much of his history of Herod from the writings of Nicolaus of Damascus, who, being attached to Herod, omitted to publish

\* ' Among the Jews, a ram, or any other animal, was considered two years old which was really but one year and thirty days old; on this principle, a child of thirteen months old would answer to the limit as well as a child of full two years.'—*Greswell*. It is probable, however, that no particular pains would be taken to ascertain the age of any child, but that all who *seemed* to be about the time of life prescribed would be butchered.

17 Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying,

18 In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

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many of his cruel acts. 3d. Matthew's statement is confirmed, in substance, by the heathen writer Macrobius, and by the philosopher Celsus, the bitter enemy of Christianity. 4th. There is nothing in Herod's character calculated to render this account improbable, for he is well known to have been of a very cruel disposition. He put the father and brother of his beloved wife to death, almost without the shadow of a reason; and that same wife, and both of her sons, shared the same fate, through his unreasonable jealousy. Almost the last act of his life was one of unheard-of cruelty. Being taken sick, he summoned the principal men of the nation to Jericho, where he then was, and confined them in a public building, with strict orders that as soon as he ceased to breathe those prisoners should be put to death, that the land might be filled with mourning: and this because he knew the Jews so detested him, that they would exult at his decease, if not prevented by this diabolical cruelty. Happily, the order was not obeyed." Josephus, in summing up the character of Herod, says, "He was a man universally cruel, and of an ungovernable anger."

Verses 17, 18. *Then was fulfilled, &c.*] That is, *completely* fulfilled; for the prophecy, which is one of those that have a double signification, had already had a partial accomplishment. *In Rama was there a voice heard, &c.*; There were at least two towns of this name; one, in the tribe of Benjamin, about six miles north of Jerusalem;

the other, probably, in that of Ephraim, estimated at from thirty to thirty-six miles north of the metropolis. At one of these places Nebuzar-adan, captain of the Chaldean host, collected his prisoners, when about to convey the Jews to Babylon. By a very striking poetic license, Rachel, the favourite wife of Jacob, and mother of Joseph and Benjamin, (or of Ephraim, Manassch, and Benjamin, there being no tribe called by the name of Joseph,) is represented by Jeremiah (xxxi. 15) as rising from her grave, and wailing over her children, about to be dragged into captivity. She is, however, at length comforted by the assurance that "they should come again from the land of the enemy to their own border." This was the first fulfilment of the prophecy. The massacre at Bethlehem, however, was a second and complete accomplishment of the prediction; and Rachel, "who was buried in the way to Ephrath, that is, Bethlehem," is again set before us as aroused from her deep slumbers by the agonizing shrieks of her descendants, and as the representative of the bereaved mothers, "weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted, *because they are not.*" The phrase, "they are not," was one frequently used by the ancient writers to express death. Some commentators think that Matthew quotes Jeremiah's prediction merely in the way of illustration, importing nothing more than that the lament in Bethlehem, on this occasion, *resembled* the mourning at Rama, when the nation was about to be carried into bondage. The reader is reminded, that in the East the wailing for the dead is exceedingly loud and piercing—the real or hired mourner rending the air with her cries. It is necessary to recollect this in order to feel the full force of the prophet's image.

19 But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,

20 Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life.

21 And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.

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Verse 19. *Herod was dead, &c.*] He died at Jericho, after a reign of thirty-seven years from the time he was invested with the kingly title by the Romans. During his illness "his sufferings were painful in the extreme; attended with ulcerations in the lower parts of the body, and strong convulsions." He continued, as has been shown, the same cruel man to the close of his life. After the death of Herod the kingdom of Judea was divided into three parts, over which three of his sons were appointed rulers; one of them, Archelaus, with the title of ethnarch, and the two others, Herod Antipas and Herod Philip, with the title of tetrarchs. Occasionally, however, by way of courtesy, the title of *king* was applied to them. The provinces of Judea, Idumea, and Samaria were allotted to Archelaus; Galilee and Perea to Antipas; Iturea, Trachonitis, &c., to Philip.

Verse 20. *They are dead which sought, &c.*] The plural form, instead of the singular, is said to be common in classic authors when speaking of a king; and some commentators suppose the sacred historian to have conformed to this usage when he says "*they* are dead," &c. Others think some accomplice or accomplices of Herod, from whom danger might be apprehended, to be meant; particularly his son Antipater, who was executed for conspiracy against the life of Herod, but five days before that monarch's death.

Verse 21. *When he heard that Archelaus did reign,*

22 But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee:

23 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

&c.] From this it would seem that Joseph's intention was to settle in Judea, probably at Bethlehem. On learning, however, that Archelaus reigned in Judea, he was "afraid to go thither;" probably knowing him to be of a cruel and tyrannical disposition, and that he would not, therefore, hesitate to carry out his father's design of destroying Jesus, should he learn, by any means, that he was within his dominions. By divine direction Joseph proceeded to Galilee, which province was under the sway of Antipas, a ruler of much milder disposition and more just government than the ethnarch of Judea. About nine years after this time Archelaus was deposed by the Roman emperor, on account of his tyrannical and unjust government, and banished to Vienne, in Gaul, where he died.

Verse 23. *Nazareth*] For a brief description of this place, see note on Luke i. 26, p. 57. *That it might be fulfilled—He shall be called a Nazarene*] No such passage occurs in the Old Testament, neither does Matthew refer to any, nor to any particular prophet, but to the prophets generally, his phrase being, "which was spoken by the prophets:" so that something was thus accomplished in the history of Christ to which the prophets in general bear concurrent testimony. This they do in predicting that Jesus should be "despised" as well as "rejected" of men—that he should be, with many, an object of con-

## LUKE ii. 40.

40 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him.

tumely and reproach. Nazareth was proverbially a despised place, even among the Galileans themselves, much more so among the more southern Jews, as is clear from Nathanael's question, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Thus the appellation, "Nazarene," became, among the Jews, a proverbial term to denote a despised and dishonoured person; and it was applied to our Saviour, first, as denoting his place of residence; secondly, as here, to express the general estimate of his character. "Bishop Middleton renders—the Nazarene."

## LUKE ii. 40.

Verse 40. *The child grew*] Increased in bodily strength and stature. *Waxing strong in spirit*] See note on Luke i. 80, p. 89. The reader should never forget that Jesus was truly man as well as essential God. *Filled with wisdom*] That is, abundantly furnished with the influences of heavenly wisdom, imparting to the mental or rational principle constantly increasing knowledge, both of spiritual and temporal things, as the capacity to receive such knowledge increased. *The grace of God was upon him* The word rendered "grace" is supposed by Dr. A. Clarke to import here that the *favour* or *approbation* of God rested on Jesus. "Even Christ himself," says he, "who knew no sin, grew in the favour of God; and, as to his human nature, increased in the graces of the Holy Spirit. From this we learn, that if a man were as pure and as perfect as the man Jesus Christ himself was, yet he might nevertheless increase in the image, and consequently in

## LESSON VIII.

*Chris<sup>t</sup> visits Jerusalem, at twelve years of age—He discourses with the doctors in the temple.*

LUKE ii. 41–52.

**N**OW his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover.

the favour, of God ; who loves every person in proportion to the nearness of the approaches made to his own perfections.”

## NOTES ON LUKE ii. 41–52.

Verse 41. *His parents*] The parents of Jesus. *Every year at the passover*] The Jewish law required all the males of the nation to assemble themselves, before the Lord, “in the place which he should choose to place his name there,” three times in the year, namely, at the feast of the passover or unleavened bread ; at the feast of harvest, or weeks, or pentecost, as it is now commonly called ; and at the feast of tabernacles or ingathering. Exod. xxiii. 14–17 ; Deut. xvi. 16. These festivals were celebrated at the place where the national altar was erected for the time being ; consequently, when the tabernacle was at Shiloh, they were held there ; but, ever since David had removed the ark to Jerusalem, they had been attended to in that city. Each of these feasts lasted eight days, including the day on which it commenced and that on which it closed. Strictly speaking, the *passover* was kept but on one day, “the fourteenth of the first month,” or Abib, “in the evening ;” and the seven following days were, properly, the feast of unleavened bread. See 2 Chron. xxxv. 17, and Ezra vi. 19, 22, where the distinction be-

tween the two feasts is clearly stated. Still, in common parlance, either name was used to designate both feasts, as the conclusion of the one was but the commencement of the other. Children, as well as sick and infirm persons, were of course excused from attendance, as also were all females. Yet, though not commanded to be present, females used often to attend, especially at the feast of the passover, which was considered the principal festival of the year. The feast of passover was instituted in commemoration of the Lord's "passing over" the houses of the Israelites, on whose door-posts the blood of the paschal lamb was sprinkled, at the time he destroyed the first-born of man and of beast belonging to the Egyptians. The feast was commanded to be observed on the fourteenth of the month Abib or Nisan; and was kept by sacrificing a lamb (or kid) for every household or company which should agree to eat the feast together, on the afternoon of that day, "between the two evenings," or between three and six o'clock in the afternoon, roasting it, without breaking its bones, and eating it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, (such as lettuce, &c.) The later Jews added wine and some other things. The lamb was slain at the temple, (or tabernacle,) by one of the individuals who was to partake of it, and a portion of its blood sprinkled on the altar by one of the priests. If any Jew was necessarily prevented from observing the feast at the regular time, provision was made for his attendance to the ceremony at a later period. Num. ix. 9-11. The first passover was eaten in Egypt, the night before the Lord brought out his people "with a high hand," and they were directed to eat it in haste, "with their loins girded, their shoes on their feet, and their staff in their hand;" but the Jews of our Saviour's time, it is



said, when partaking of this feast, were studious to avoid all appearance of haste, and were so far from eating it standing, with loins girded, &c., that they positively forbade any such equipment. The design of these assemblages seems to have been, in part, to unite the Hebrews among themselves, and to counteract the tendency to separation which the distinction into distinctly marked tribes was calculated to produce. On these occasions, notwithstanding their petty differences, they must have been led to feel that they were indeed brethren and fellow-citizens; and that this was really the case, appears from the fact that after the separation of the tribes into two kingdoms, Jeroboam, the founder of the new kingdom, became so alarmed on viewing the probable moral effect of the continued resort of his subjects to Jerusalem at these religious anniversaries, that he set up golden calves in Dan and Bethel, principally with the hope, it would seem, of inducing his subjects to hold their annual meetings at places within his own dominions. 1 Kings xii. 25-33. It is also not unlikely that these meetings of different tribes three times a year in the same place tended very much to promote internal commerce among the Jews, enabling the different tribes to interchange their several commodities with each other, by which these frequent journeys would be rather a profit than an expense to them. Such a procedure was at least obvious, and is at this day exemplified in the case of the Mohammedan pilgrimages to Mecca.

An objection has been made with reference to these frequent concourses of all the male inhabitants in one place, namely, the unreasonableness of leaving their families and homes unprotected, and exposed, during the greater part of their history, to the incursions of the hos

42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem, after the custom of the feast.

43 And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it.

tile people on their borders. The answer is, they were not unprotected: they had the *very best protection*. It was expressly promised by God that "no man should desire their land" during their absence; (Exod. xxiv. ;) that is, that their homes should be secure from any hostile invasion. And, in fact, their enemies never did avail themselves of the apparent advantages which such occasions seemed to offer. "No man desired their land." Surely "every word of God is pure; [sincere;] he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him," Prov. xxx. 5. See further in note on Matt. xxvi. 30.

Verse 42. *When he was twelve years old, &c.*] It is probable that this was the age when pious Jews were in the habit of taking their boys with them to the great feasts, that so they might be better instructed in the spirit and ceremonies of their religion than they could otherwise be, when, a year afterward, they would be legally bound to attend. At a little over thirteen they were considered "children of the covenant," and as such, probably, amenable to all the duties, and entitled to all the privileges, of members of the Jewish church.

Verse 43. *When they had fulfilled the days*] Namely, the days allotted to the celebration of the feast—when the festival was over. *Jesus tarried behind*] To "tarry" is to *remain*—Jesus stayed at Jerusalem after his parents had left that city, on their return homeward. *Supposing him to have been in the company*] When the people were going to and returning from the great festivals, it was

44 But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey ; and they sought him among *their* kinsfolk and acquaintance.

45 And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.

46 And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.

47 And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.

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usual with them to travel in large companies called caravans. As every person would have some acquaintance or friends in the company, it would be very natural to seek them out, and join company, for social conversation and the like. Just so, also, with the younger part of the travellers ; they would seek each other's society, and associate together. In this way the caravan might pass on until time to halt for refreshment, or to make arrangements for the night ; on doing which, the children would repair to, or be sought for by, their respective parents or guardians ; and if any were absent, it would then be discovered. It is not improbable that Jesus was *with* his parents when they were about to start on their journey, and that, seeing him then, they felt perfectly sure of his being in the company. Having ascertained, however, at the close of the day's travel, that he was not with them, Joseph and Mary returned (probably on the following morning) to Jerusalem in search of him.

Verses 44, 46. *After three days*] That is, on the third day, according to the Jewish method of reckoning time. The first day was spent in their homeward journey ; the second in their return to the capital ; on the third day they found him. *In the temple*] Probably in one of the rooms attached to the temple, not the sacred edifice itself

*Sitting in the midst of the doctors*] By “the doctors” are meant the teachers,—probably the more distinguished teachers,—of the law. The phrase, “sitting in the midst,” may denote either that Jesus sat on the low benches occupied by the pupils and auditors then present, or that he had (by invitation) taken a seat on the elevated bench occupied by the doctors. It is said that the rabbis sometimes offered this mark of encouragement and honour when their admiration of any one’s abilities was strongly excited. As the seats both of the teachers and the taught were semicircular, Jesus may, in popular language, be said to have been “in the midst,” or among, the doctors, whichever place he occupied. *Hearing them, and asking them questions*] This does not mean that our Lord was *disputing* with the doctors, but simply that he availed himself of a privilege allowed to any one, of asking questions connected with their religious belief. The discussions are said to have been generally of a trifling character; such, of course, would not be the case in the present instance. The Jewish teachers set a high value on the interrogatory system of instruction, as being well calculated to call into exercise the powers of the pupils’ minds, and to furnish the instructors with a favourable opportunity of displaying their readiness and skill in answering the queries put to them. Jesus manifested such wisdom in the questions he put and the answers he gave as to attract much attention. Yet we cannot suppose there was any thing assuming in his manner. His remarks were, doubtless, made with modesty; and the observations of the “doctors” received with the attention and reverence due to the age and rank of those who offered them. Religion teaches all, and especially the young to treat others with respect, and to honour age. “Thou

48 And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.

49 And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?

snait rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man."

Verse 48. *When they saw him they were amazed*] "Amazed" means, *greatly surprised*. They were probably "amazed" at seeing him in such a situation. His wisdom (even if they heard of his remarks) would not have astonished them as it did others, because of their greater knowledge of his true character: their astonishment at seeing him seated with the doctors may have been very natural. *Why hast thou thus dealt with us*] *Why hast thou caused us so much trouble? Thy father*] So called in virtue of being the husband of Mary, and the *supposed*, though not *real*, father of Jesus. *Sought thee sorrowing*] With pain of heart and perturbation of mind.

Verse 49. *How is it, &c.*] Equivalent to saying, Why did ye give yourselves this anxiety? A mild reproof for allowing themselves to be uneasy for his safety, knowing who he was. *Wist ye not*] "Wist" is an obsolete word signifying *knew*. *I must be about my Father's business*] In the original the sentence thus rendered is not complete; our translators have therefore added the word "business," as being, in their estimation, most likely to be the sense. Some supply the word *house*, and render the clause, "Knew ye not that I must be at my Father's" house? The original, it is said, will bear either construction. By "Father," Jesus evidently meant the Al-

50 And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.

51 And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.

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mighty; and the "business" which he should "be about" was the instruction and ultimate salvation of men. If the other rendering be the true reading, it will be at once perceived that by his "Father's house" Jesus meant the temple, which is frequently called God's house, as being dedicated to his service, and where his spiritual presence was supposed to be. See John ii. 16.

Verse 50. *They understood not the saying*] Did not comprehend its full import; not perceiving, probably, how this circumstance of conversing with the doctors was a performing of his "Father's business," or what was its precise connection with the great end of his coming into the world. Christ's object in absenting himself from the company of his parents, discoursing with the teachers, and answering his mother in the manner he did, was probably to fix the attention of his countrymen upon himself, and lead them to expect the speedy manifestation of Him who was emphatically the "salvation of Israel."

Verse 51. *Subject unto them*] "Subject" here means the same as *obedient*: he paid them all dutiful reverence. Just so all children should love, esteem, and obey their parents. Christ is, in this respect, their example, or copy. We learn nothing more from Scripture of the history of our blessed Lord, (except that "he grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man,") until about the time of his baptism by John, when he was, perhaps, thirty years of age. The early Christians, however, assert that he learned the trade of a carpenter under

## LESSON IX.      [Date, A. D. 26.

*Commencement of the ministry of John the Baptist.*  
MATT. iii. 1-12; MARK i. 2-8; LUKE iii. 1-18.

## LUKE iii. 1-3.

NOW in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and

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his father, and aided him in the support of the family; which tradition is rendered highly probable by the fact that the Jews were obliged to acquire a competent knowledge of some branch of business. We thus learn, from the example of Jesus, that honest industry is praiseworthy in all; and to despise that pride which considers a mechanical employment disgraceful.

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## NOTES ON LUKE iii. 1-3.

Verse 1. *In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Cesar*] In the fifteenth year from the time that the emperor Augustus constituted Tiberius his colleague in the government, though only the thirteenth of Tiberius's reign as sole emperor. *Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea*] On the demise of Herod the Great, Archelaus, one of Herod's sons, was appointed ruler of the provinces of Judea, Samaria, and Idumea, with the title of ethnarch. About nine years after his elevation, however, Archelaus was for his tyranny deposed by Augustus, and banished to Gaul, where he died. His dominions were then attached to Syria, as a part of that presidency, and a governor appointed for Judea and Samaria. Of the governors thus appointed, Pilate was the fifth, succeeding Valerius Gratus in that office about a year before John the Baptist began

Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene,

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his ministry. He continued in office about ten years, when he was removed, in consequence of certain charges for cruelty being preferred against him by the Samaritans. He is supposed to have been exiled to Vienna, and to have ended his life by suicide. *Herod—tetrarch of Galilee*] The title “tetrarch” originally and properly denoted the ruler of the fourth part of a tribe or nation which, as a whole, was subject to a king: but at this time the term was used in a looser sense, being applied to any ruler who was in subjection to a superior, without much respect to the portion of the tribe or nation under his sway. The “Herod” here named is Herod Antipas; famous in sacred history as the incestuous husband of Herodias, and the murderer of John the Baptist. *His brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis*] This Philip was half brother to Herod Antipas, being a son of the same father, but having a different mother. Care should be taken not to confound him with Philip, the first husband of Herodias, mentioned Matthew xiv. 3 and Mark vi. 17, who was another brother, resident, chiefly, at Rome. Philip the tetrarch subsequently married Salome, the daughter of Herodias. The country of “Iturea” is thought to have been situated between the lake of Tiberias and the territory of Damascus, and to be included in the flat country at this day called Djedour. If so, it was probably comprised in the allotments of the eastern half tribe of Manasseh and Gad. The ancient Bashan was, in all likelihood, included within its bounds. It was once very fertile and populous, but at present is supposed to contain not more than twenty small



2 Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word

villages, and partakes much of the neglected character of the neighbouring districts. An intelligent traveller (Major Skinner) remarks of it, "It is desolate to pass over so rich a country for many hours without seeing a habitation." "Trachonitis" lay east of Iturea, extending to the borders of the Arabian desert. It was a rough, uneven country. This district is now called, according to Burckhardt, El Ledja and Djebel Haouran. *Lysanias—of Abilene*] This Lysanias is conjectured to have been the son or grandson of one Lysanias whom Mark Antony put to death, and gave part of his territory to Cleopatra, queen of Egypt. Nothing more is now known of him than what is recorded in the sacred writings. "The tetrarchy of Abilene took its name from the town of Abila, which appears to have been somewhere to the north or north-east of Palestine, bordering on Anti-Libanus."—*Pictorial Bible*.\*

Verse 2. *Annas and Caiaphas being high priests*] The Jewish law authorizes the existence of but one high priest at a time, yet here two are mentioned as enjoying that office. "This is, however, easily accounted for by the changes which had at this time taken place in the character of the office, and in the mode of succession to it. After the return from the captivity, the high priesthood remained in the family of Eleazer, son of Aaron, for about three hundred and eighty years; but during this time there was much irregularity in the order of succession, which irregularity increased with time. After the death of Ne-

\* Abilene was a district in the valley of Lebanon, so called from Abila, its chief town, eighteen miles north of Damascus, according to Antoninus."—*Bagster*.

of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.

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hemiah, if not before, Judea was regarded by the Persians as a province of Syria, the satrap of which intrusted the civil government [of Judea] to the high priest, as the principal person in the Jewish nation. From this the most fearful disorders and profanations ultimately arose, the possession of civil power becoming an object of ambition to unprincipled members of the hierarchal family, who were continually plotting to supersede each other. At last the office was taken, with the secular one of prince of his nation, by Jonathan, the brother and successor of Judas Maccabeus, at a time when the only known survivor of the former family, Onias, was in Egypt, where he had produced a considerable schism by setting up a new temple, altar, and priesthood, in that country. Jonathan was by birth a priest of the house of Joarib, which formed the first of the twenty-four classes appointed by David to officiate in the temple. 1 Chron. xxiv. 7. In this family (called Asmonean, from Asmoneus, the great great grandfather of Jonathan) the dignity continued till the time of Herod the Great. From this time forward the office may be considered as thrown open to all the priesthood; and, in the end, some who were not even of the priestly line enjoyed it. In the seventy years preceding the destruction of the temple by the Romans, there were not less than twenty-six high priests, only one of whom died in the office, the rest having been deposed. It appears that those who *had been* high priests [frequently] retained, after their removal from the office, the title and much of the influence belonging to that station. Hence Josephus, like Luke, in speaking of the affairs of this period, mentions contem-

3 And he came into all the country about Jordan, porary high priests. ‘Annas,’ or Ananus, as Josephus calls him, was made high priest by Cyrenius, after the deposition of Archelaus. He held the office about fourteen years, until the administration of Valerius Gratus, the fourth Roman governor, by whom ‘Caiaphas,’ son-in-law of Annas, was appointed high priest. When Gratus was recalled, Caiaphas was left in possession of his office, and continued in it during Pilate’s term of service, consequently during the whole period of our Lord’s ministry. Caiaphas, then, was the actual high priest, though the age, rank, and influence of Annas caused him, also, to be addressed by that title.” *The word of the Lord came unto John*] This John is he since known by the appellation of the Baptist, or the Baptizer. By the “word of the Lord,” is meant that divine mission or influence whereby John was called to the special work assigned him, which call was doubtless communicated to him in a supernatural manner. This command was given at this time to convince John that the period had arrived when he should announce to his nation that the “kingdom of heaven was at hand.” The Baptist was now, probably, thirty years old, which was the age at which the priests commenced their ministrations, and the season is supposed by Greswell to have been about the feast of tabernacles, answering, that year, to the fifteenth of our September.

Verse 3. *He came into all the country about Jordan*] Rather, he *went* into, &c., in obedience to the “word of the Lord.” The sphere of John’s preaching is supposed to have chiefly been that part of the wilderness of Judea (Matt. iii. 1) lying between the southern extremity of the sea of Galilee and the northern extremity of the Dead sea,

preaching the baptism of repentance, for the remission of sins.

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“a tract of country which was wild and desert, yet having in it several large cities, and through which ran the direct road to several other important places.” It was, consequently, much travelled. *Preaching the baptism of repentance*] The word rendered “preaching” implies the *publishing*, or *publicly proclaiming* any thing, as a herald or crier does. Bloomfield says, the word also includes the notion of earnestness or vehemence. The import, then, is, that John publicly delivered and earnestly enforced his message. By “preaching the baptism of repentance,” is meant, that he called men to repent of their sins, and administered the rite of baptism to such as made profession of penitence, and of faith in his doctrine. *For the remission of sins*] “Remission” means *forgiveness*, *pardon*. Forgiveness of sin seems to have been promised to all such as “with hearty repentance and true faith” in the Messiah (John iii. 36) received this symbolic rite. With the import of baptism or washing, as an emblem of the putting away of sin, the Jews were familiar, for proselytes from Gentilism to Judaism were, ever since the return from the Babylonish captivity, if not prior to that event, baptized as well as circumcised. Such of them, therefore, as received John’s baptism in an understanding manner, would consider themselves as being thus introduced into a society requiring of its members an increased degree of moral purity ; and would, perhaps, consider this rite as so far involving a renunciation of Judaism as to be equal to a declaration that in their opinion deliverance from sin was attainable only through faith in the promised Messiah.

## MATT. iii. 2-10.

2 And saying, Repent ye ; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. .

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## MATT. iii. 2-10. -

Verse 2. *Repent ye*] This was the burden of John's preaching. Scriptural repentance implies, 1st. Conviction of sin ; 2d. Sorrow for sin ; 3d. Confession of sin, and supplication for forgiveness ; 4th. Opposition to and departure from sin. As "all have sinned," repentance is required of all, according to the spiritual light and privileges which each one possesses or might have possessed. Acts iii. 19 ; xvii. 30. It must not be inferred, however, that repentance can atone for transgression, or that through it, merely, salvation is attainable. Repentance does not reconcile men to God, but puts them into a state to be reconciled to him. It takes not away men's sins, but prepares them for salvation. It is not a state of safety—it does not place men in the refuge—but only in the way to it. "We have redemption through Christ's blood, even the forgiveness of sins." Col. i. 14. *For the kingdom of heaven is at hand*] By "kingdom of heaven" here is meant that spiritual dominion in the hearts and minds of men which Christ came to establish by the instrumentality of the gospel and the regenerating influences of the Holy Ghost. It has been already stated that the Jews were, at this time, in expectation of the appearance of the Messiah, whose reign they frequently spoke of as *the coming of the kingdom of heaven*, or, of *God*, borrowing the language, probably, from the predictions of Daniel and of other prophets. By announcing this kingdom or reign as being "at hand," therefore, the Jews would understand John as

3 For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

saying that the Messiah was about to make his appearance and set up his kingdom. This declaration had, doubtless, a powerful effect on the people, and conduced much to the success of John's ministry.

Verse 3. *The voice of one crying, Prepare, &c.*] By a figure drawn from the occasional practices of eastern monarchs or conquerors, Isaiah, from whose prophecy (chap. xl. 3-5) this passage is quoted, represents the coming of Christ to establish his gospel kingdom under the notion of the march of a mighty potentate, whose herald is sent before him with commands to have all impediments to a safe, easy, and rapid progress removed out of the way.\* In Isaiah the incommunicable name of Deity, Jehovah, is given to this august personage; and as it is evident that the person meant is Jesus Christ, another proof is thus furnished that he is really and truly God. The prophecy was delivered more than seven hundred years before its fulfilment. At the time that John began his ministry, the Jewish church was exceedingly corrupt. An attention to merely outward ceremonies was cultivated instead of inward purity and devotion; and hypocrisy, self-righteousness, and spiritual pride had usurped the place of judgment, mercy, and the love of God. There was thus the form of piety without its power—their offerings might be characterized as the presentment of a dead carcass instead of a living sacrifice. John's mission was designed to arouse the people from this state of spiritual

\* Luke quotes the original prediction more fully. See chap. iii. 4-6.

4 And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.

estrangement, and to "prepare the way of the Lord" by removing this dead formality, introducing a more elevated, scriptural piety, and thus turn the hearts of the people unto God.

Verse 4. *Had his raiment of camel's hair*] "Raiment" is clothing: the particular article meant is, probably, the outside garment. This garment was not woven of the fine hair of the camel, from which the stuff properly called camlet is made, (and of which our camlet, though composed of woollen, is an imitation,) but of the long, shaggy hair of the camel, from which a coarse cloth is still made. Of this material the Arab tents are usually composed, and it is described by one eastern traveller as being "somewhat like the coarse hair cloths we lay over goods." It would appear from Zech. xiii. 2, 4, that such a dress was characteristic of prophets, and was, therefore, assumed by the idolatrous seers, that they might the more surely deceive the people. See, also, 2 Kings i. 8, where Elijah is spoken of as a "hairy man"—that is, wearing a garment of hair cloth. *His meat was locusts and wild honey*] The word "meat" formerly meant food, of whatsoever character. It has been disputed whether the "locust" of the text refers to the animal or vegetable locust; though the general opinion is, that the former was intended. This insect is ranked, in the law, among clean animals, (Lev. xi. 22,) and therefore used for food. In appearance it greatly resembles the grasshopper, but is much larger. The common brown locust is usually about three inches long. Volney represents locusts to be common in Syria and almost all the south of Asia; and says that their

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5 Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan,

6 And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.

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number is often astonishing, the whole earth being frequently covered with them for the space of several leagues. They are exceedingly destructive to vegetation. The inhabitants of the countries frequented by them use them as a common article of food. They are usually salted and dried; and when cooked, fried with a little oil or fat, though sometimes the Arabs merely soak them in warm water. Mr. Jackson says the Moors esteem them a great delicacy. The "wild honey" was found in the crevices of rocks, hollows of trees, and other places, deposited there by swarms of wild bees. Judges xiv. 8; 1 Sam. xiv. 26, 27; Psa. lxxxi. 16.

Verse 5. *Jerusalem, and all Judea*] Meaning the inhabitants of these places. We need not suppose that *all* the people went; for the phrase denotes no more than that a large proportion of them did so. So we sometimes say, "The whole world knows it,"—"The whole city was present;" when no more is meant than that the matter spoken of is well known, or that a great number of citizens were present. Such expressions are common among all nations. *Round about Jordan*] From some distance on either side that river. The people crowded to hear him preach.

Verse 6. *Were baptized in Jordan*] The word "baptize," and its derivatives, is used in Scripture in a variety of senses. It means to *wash*, either by dipping or immersing in water, or by pouring on water. Thus it is said of the Pharisees, that they "baptized before they ate," though the baptism was a mere washing of hands by the



pouring on of water. The word also signifies to *tinge* or *stain*, as do those who dye clothes. The usual import of the Hebrew word rendered by the Greek baptize, is to *dip*, *sprinkle*, or *pour on*. Thus in Lev. iv. 6 direction is given to the priest to *dip* (Gr. baptize) his finger in the blood of the slain beast, and *sprinkle* it before the Lord; and in Lev. xiv. 4-7, it is commanded, in cleansing a leper, that two birds shall be taken, together with cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop; that one of the birds shall be killed, and the living bird and other articles be *dipped* (Gr. baptized) in the blood of the slain bird, and the leper *sprinkled* therewith seven times. Now it is evident that these things could not be *immersed* in the blood of a single bird. In Dan. iv. 33, where we are informed that the body of Nebuchadnezzar "was wet with the dew of heaven," the Greek reads "*baptized with*," &c.; although it is certain that he was not *immersed* in dew, but that it fell *upon* him. The words "*in Jordan*" do not necessarily imply that the people were plunged in the river, for the word rendered "*in*" may with equal propriety be translated *at*, and so simply denote the *place* instead of the *mode* of baptism. John's baptism was, in one respect, a type of Christ's; hence he says, "I baptize you with water; he that cometh after me shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost," &c. Accordingly, on the day of pentecost, there appeared unto the disciples cloven tongues like as of fire, which *sat upon* them; and they were filled with the Holy Ghost. When Cornelius and his family received the same gift, "the Holy Ghost *fell on* all them which heard the word;" "and they of the circumcision that believed were astonished, because that on the Gentiles also was *poured out* the gift of the Holy Ghost." Thus the baptism of the Holy Spirit was a *descent upon*, not an *immersion into*

Either, then, baptism is not to be *limited* to immersion, or the promise of baptism by the Holy Ghost has never been fulfilled. The "Jordan" is the principal river, not only of Palestine, but of Syria. Its celebrity, however, does not arise so much from its real importance as the chief river of the country, as from the remarkable events of which it has been the witness. The source of the river is supposed to be situate a few miles north of the present town of Banias, the Scriptural Cesarea Philippi, and consequently near the Lebanon mountains. After pursuing its course a few miles, it is lost in a subterranean passage, from which it issues at Banias ; soon after which it runs into Lake Houle, the "waters of Merom" of the Old Testament. On leaving this lake, it continues its course about thirteen miles to the sea of Galilee, through which its current is distinctly visible. The sea of Galilee is supposed to be about sixteen miles long. After this, the Jordan runs some seventy miles farther to the Dead Sea, into which it empties itself. The course of the river is nearly south, and its probable length, in a direct line, rather more than a hundred miles, though its various windings may increase its real length to one hundred and thirty miles. The average breadth of the river is reckoned at eighty-two feet, and its depth at nine or ten feet. In Josh. iii. 15, it is said that "the Jordan overfloweth al his banks all the time of harvest ;" but the original Hebrew, according to Prof. Robinson, "expresses no more than that it was filled up to all its banks." *Confessing their sins*] "Sin," in the most enlarged sense of the term, is any want of conformity to the divine will ; but in the usual import of the word, is a wilful transgression of God's law. 1 John iii. 4. To "confess" sin, is penitently to acknowledge and bewail these violations of duty ; such confession

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation

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to be made to God and man, or to God only, as the case may be.

Verse 7. *Pharisees and Sadducees*] These were two sects of the Jews. The origin of the first-named sect has eluded all research ; even the time of its appearance cannot be determined. Some date its rise as far back as three hundred years before Christ, though the general opinion is, that it had its beginning about two hundred years before that event. It is probable that the sect did not, as such, spring into existence at once ; but was gradually formed by the influence of certain opinions, which drew into close association those who embraced them, and finally banded them together as a sect. The name Pharisee is usually derived from a Hebrew word which signifies to *separate* ; not that they separated themselves from the prescribed religious services, or from intercourse with the mass of the people, for this they did not do. The separation by which they were distinguished, arose from an assumption, on their part, of superior knowledge and holiness ; which fact led our Saviour to represent one of them as saying to the Almighty, “I thank thee that I am not as other men”—and which caused them to look down with disdain on those who did not belong to their party.

The Pharisees were not of any particular class ; for persons of every tribe, family, and condition of life, both male and female, were found in their ranks. Their character for sanctity, gave them great influence with the people, by whom, generally, they were highly respected. They were thus enabled to exert a powerful influence on the government, so long as the Jews continued to exer-

of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come ?

cise the prerogatives of government. The Pharisees were strongly attached to the traditions of the elders, and punctilious in the observance of every outward ceremony of their religion ; but proud, grasping, implacable, hypocritical, self-righteous, and ostentatious, in the performance of their religious duties. To this general character there were, however, some exceptions. Nicodemus, Gamaliel, and Saul [Paul] may be cited as instances of men who held the principles of the sect without being tainted by the vices which those principles were calculated to produce. Their leading tenets were, that the world was governed by fate, or by a fixed decree of God ; that the dead, at least the virtuous dead, would be raised ; that there were angels, good and bad ; that God was under an obligation to bestow peculiar favours on the Jews ; and that they were justified by the merits of Abraham. But, as has been already remarked, their distinguishing trait was, their zeal for the observance of the traditions of the elders, which they deemed of equal, or superior obligation, to the written law.

The sect of the Sadducees arose about two hundred and sixty years before Christ. Its founder was one Sadoc, a pupil of Antigonus of Sochos, president of the sanhedrim. This Antigonus had taught the duty of serving God disinterestedly, without hope of reward or fear of punishment. Sadoc, not properly understanding the doctrine of his master, drew the inference that there was no future state of rewards or punishments ; and on this belief he founded the sect. The tenet was never popular ; and the sect of the Sadducees was insignificant in numbers as compared

with the Pharisees : but, though less numerous, the persons who embraced this persuasion were generally of the first distinction ; and several of the sect were advanced to the highpriesthood. They did not dispute the sway of the Pharisees over the multitude, and, according to Josephus, did not take so active a part in the affairs of state. Most of the opinions held by this sect were the opposites of those inculcated by the Pharisees. They insisted that there was no fate, nor even an overruling providence ; but that man enjoyed the most ample freedom of action, with full power to do good or evil, as he thought proper ; that God exercised no influence upon him ; and that his prosperity or adversity were respectively the result of his own wisdom or folly. In opposition to the Pharisees, they not only held that the soul of man was mortal, and perished with his body, but also denied the existence of angels or spirits. Another great matter in which they were distinguished from the Pharisees was, that they rejected the traditions of the elders, insisting that assent was not authoritatively required to any opinion or practice which the written law, in its literal acceptation, did not inculcate or enjoin. It has been charged upon them that they only received the five books of Moses, and rejected the rest of the Old Testament writings ; but this imputation rests on no good foundation. Josephus, who is sufficiently bitter against them, does not anywhere hint at this, although he would scarcely have failed to do so had it been true. It is, however, not unlikely that they set a far higher value on the books of Moses than on the other scriptures. As Josephus was himself a Pharisee, and consequently an opponent of the Sadducees, perhaps we should receive with some reserve the general character which he gives to this sect, “a set of men churlish and morose toward

each other, and cruel and savage to all besides." *O generation of vipers*] Luke fails to distinguish these words as having been spoken specially to the Pharisees and Sadducees; Matthew's statement is, therefore, in this respect, more particular than Luke's. The viper is a species of serpent, famed, in hot countries, for its venom, which is said to be one of the most active poisons in the animal kingdom. The full grown viper is from two to three feet long, and nearly as thick as a man's arm. Its colour is yellowish, speckled with brown and black spots. The head is rather flat, the mouth wide, and generally furnished with two large teeth in each jaw, through a small hole in which the poison is injected into the wound, when a bite is given. This reptile is an emblem of cunning and malignity; and it was, probably, on account of some evil intention of these men in coming "to his baptism," which evil design had become known to John, that he addressed them in such severe language. Possibly, they hoped to commend themselves to the favourable notice of the approaching Messiah by thus professing their faith in the mission of John as his harbinger. But of John's baptism in its spiritual character, as a baptism unto *repentance*, and to *faith* in the coming of the Messiah to *take away* or *remit sin*, they seem to have had no conception; for, in their own estimation, they had no sins to confess or pardon. To them, therefore, John seems to have refused to administer this distinguishing rite of his dispensation. Be this as it may, it seems tolerably certain from Luke vii. 29, 30, that they were not baptized. *Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*] Some commentators understand this to be an expression of surprise that persons of their character—the one party deeming themselves righteous, and the peculiar favourites of Heaven, the other

8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance :

9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to *our* father : for I say unto you, that God is

disbelieving a future state of existence, and consequently, in that view, needing no repentance—should be found in such a place, on such an occasion : but others think the phrase “who hath warned,” &c., to mean, no one has warned—that is, has *effectually* warned—“you to flee the wrath to come.” The “wrath to come” is referred, by some expositors, to the destruction which was about to fall on the Jewish nation, and which overtook them about forty years from this time ; but the majority, with greater probability, as we think, understand the expression to denote that punishment for sin which shall come upon the unregenerate. This wrath is always “wrath to come ;” that is, it is not only a future penal infliction, but even when commenced, it will still be “*wrath to come*,” for ever. Reader, may God in mercy save both thee and me from this fearful doom !

Verse 8. *Bring forth fruits meet for repentance*] “Meet” means *fitting, suitable* ; and “fruits of repentance,” *evidences of repentance*—those unquestionable marks of penitence which satisfy the beholder that the reformation of life is real, and consequently the repentance sincere and thorough.

Verse 9. *And think not to say, &c.*] That is, say not—do not indulge the thought, much less, depend on it. *We have Abraham to our father*] Rather, *for, or as*, our father. The Jews generally, and the Pharisees in particular, boasted much of their descent from Abraham ; and even supposed their eternal salvation to be secured by their relationship to that eminent man. The people are not to be condemned for esteeming it a high honour to have been

able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

so descended ; for it is matter of thankfulness and congratulation to have eminently pious ancestors : their error consisted in supposing that the faith and obedience of this distinguished patriarch would secure *their* safety. 'The true spiritual children of Abraham, however, are those who are imitators of his graces. Gal. iii. 29. *God is able of these stones, &c.*] It is probable that John, while uttering these words, either pointed to the rocks and stones lying around him, or indicated the [Roman ?] soldiers and other heathen whom Luke (iii. 14) informs us were present.\* If the former supposition be correct, then the sentence is expressive of the omnipotence of God, denoting that he could, though the whole Jewish nation were destroyed, raise up from the "stones" a people to stand in the place of the natural descendants of Abraham, were that necessary to bring about the purposes of his providence and grace. If the other suggestion be the true interpretation, (which seems somewhat likely, from the known contempt with which the Jews regarded the heathen, as worshippers of stocks and stones, and the opprobrious epithets they bestowed on them,) then the words may be considered indicative of the calling of the Gentiles. Ireneus, treating of this passage, remarks, "Jesus raised up children to Abraham from the stones when he turned us from the

\* Some urge that these soldiers must have been Jews, because heathens would not be likely to attend such a service as John's ; but is it not more improbable that, considering the feelings which the Jews entertained toward the Romans, any of them should be found in the ranks of their oppressors ?



10 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees : therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

## LUKE iii. 10-18.

10 And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then ?

11 He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two

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religion of stones, (meaning the worship of gods of stone, &c.,) and from our own insensible and barren state of mind, and brought us to a faith like that of Abraham."

Verse 10. *Now also the axe is laid, &c.*] Fruitful and fruitless trees have in all ages been used as a metaphor of good and bad men ; and as fruitless trees are usually, after fair trial, cut down and consigned to the flames, so the wicked persons whom John now addressed, unless they reformed their lives and brought forth the fruits of righteousness, would also be visited with most severe chastisement. Some suppose the judgment here threatened to have reference to the destruction of the Jewish nation by the Roman army, who are regarded by them as the "axe" which should fell the unprofitable tree. It is, probably, safer to suppose the Baptist referred, not so much to the Jewish state as to the dangerous condition of sinful individuals. The axe being laid "to the root,"—that is, *at*, or *near to*, the root, intimates that the danger was imminent.

## LUKE iii. 10-18.

Verses 10, 11. *What shall we do then?*] The persons who put this question were, probably, truly penitent, having been aroused by John's preaching to a sense of their sins. They were now desirous of knowing how they ought to conduct themselves in future. *He that hath two*

coats, let him impart to him that hath none ; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.

12 Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do ?

13 And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.

*coats, let him impart to him that hath none, &c.]* That is, cultivate proper feelings of benevolence and love to your fellow creatures ;—instancing one branch of practical piety as a model of all. By “coat” the tunic, or inner garment, is meant. This article somewhat resembled a shirt. It reached from the neck to a little below the knee, and was made with or without sleeves. “Sometimes two tunics seem to have been worn, probably of different stuffs, for ornament or luxury.”—*Robinson*. It was probably this unnecessary indulgence and selfishness that the Baptist meant particularly to rebuke. John’s precept partakes of the genuine spirit of the gospel, which does not so much seek to provide a set of rules for particular cases, as it does to implant correct *principles* in the mind and heart, which principles will as certainly lead to the adoption of righteous measures as a good fountain will assuredly send forth sweet waters.

Verses 12, 13. *Then came also the publicans]* The “publicans” were the collectors of the taxes and customs which had been imposed on the Jews by the Romans. They were a class of persons much detested for their occupation and overreaching. *What shall we do ?]* That is, as before, to make evident the sincerity of their repentance. *Exact no more than is appointed]* Meaning, than the amount ordered by the proper authority. “Exact no more” signifies *demand* or *take* no more. Under the Roman government the taxes were usually farmed, or let,

14 And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do vio-

to the highest bidder; these general receivers would frequently underlet to others, at as great advantage to themselves as they could; and these sub-collectors, the "publicans" of the text, would extort as much as they could from the people, both to indemnify and enrich themselves. When this situation was filled by hired agents, not sub-contractors, they, also, seized every opportunity of over-reaching, and appropriated to their own use all beyond the legal tax or custom. Against making such undue charges the Baptist cautions the publicans present. It will be perceived that John does not condemn the occupation as unlawful, as many of the Jews thought it to be; for if taxes be necessary for the support of government, they must be collected; and the collector, if he properly discharge his duties, is not only a useful, but a respectable officer. If the repentance of these publicans could not be accounted real unless manifested to be so by an abandonment of their accustomed extortions, what shall be thought of the Christianity of such professors as take advantage of the ignorance or necessities of others to "drive a good bargain" as it is sometimes termed—in plain language, to *cheat* them? "By their fruits shall ye know them."

Verse 14. *The soldiers, &c.*] It is impossible positively to determine what soldiers these were. We presume them to have belonged to the Roman forces stationed in Judea. *Do violence to no man*] The word rendered "violence" properly denotes *to put in fear*: the meaning then is, that they were not to extort money or goods by threats or other violence, as the Roman soldiery are allowed, by their own writers, to have been much in the habit of doing. *Neither accuse falsely*] Do not bring false information or

lence to no man, neither accuse *any* falsely ; and be content with your wages.

15 And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not ;

16 John answered, saying unto *them* all, I indeed baptize

unjust accusation against any. *Be content with your wages*] The word rendered “wages” signifies not only the money allotted to a Roman soldier, which Dr. Clarke says was two oboli, about three cents, per day, but all the usual supply of provision, or, as we should term them, *rations*. The amount of John’s reply to the question, “What shall we do?” is, “Abandon your sins, and lead a righteous life ;” for his injunctions constantly inculcate the practice of piety. And this general injunction he adapted to the circumstances of the respective classes of his hearers. The conditions of evangelical repentance are the same now as they were then ; consequently, he that would obtain the remission of sin must truly believe on Christ ; which he cannot do unless he also “ceases to do evil,” and “learns to do well.”

Verse 15. *The people were in expectation*] Namely, of further developments of John’s true character. The impression made by his ministry was so great, that men were in doubt whether he might not be the Messiah. *Mused*] Or, as the margin reads, “reasoned or debated,” within themselves.

Verses 16, 17. *John answered*] It is quite common, in the sacred writings, to say that a person “answered” even when no question had been asked. In such cases it may be understood either to denote a reply to an undivulged question—that is, to a query which existed in the mind but had not been spoken out, or the mere continuation of

you with water ; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose : he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire :

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a discourse. For an instance of the former use of the word, see Luke vii. 39, 40 ; and of the latter, Matt. xi. 25. The present case seems to belong to the former class, being probably designed as an answer to the inquiries which existed in the minds of the people as to the true character of John. *I indeed baptize you with water*] Meaning, with water only. Matthew's account adds "unto repentance"—that is, upon repentance ; such being the condition of baptism. For some remarks on the subject of baptism, see note on Matt. iii. 6, pages 162, 163. *One mightier than I cometh*] Namely, Jesus, the Christ or Messiah. *The latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose*] The word rendered "shoes" means *sandals*. In the earliest stages of society, the only protection men used for the feet, was to fasten a piece of hide, or thin piece of wood, to the sole of the foot, to guard it from stones, thorns, the burning sands, &c. These were called sandals : they were secured to the under part of the foot by thongs of skin or leather, which constitute what is here termed "latchet." Sandals were very generally used in the east at the time of our Saviour, as they are at the present day. On entering a house or temple, it was customary to unloose and take off the sandals, and to put them on again on leaving. To loose and bind on sandals was the business of the lowest servants.\* The expression

\* Roberts, in his "Illustrations" of eastern manners, says, "A respectable man never goes out without his servant or attendant ; thus he has always some one to do any thing he may require. When the ground is smooth, or where there

17 Whose fan *is* in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable.

18 And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people.

made use of by John was, therefore, one of great humility, importing that such was the dignity of "Him who should come after," that he [John] did not consider himself worthy to be his humblest servant. *He shall baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire*] The "baptism of the Holy Ghost" means his comforting and renewing influences; (Titus iii. 5, 6;) which it is the privilege of every Christian to enjoy. The words "and with fire" do not denote something distinct from the "Holy Ghost," being merely explanatory of the *nature* of this "baptism;" conveying the idea that it should be of an illuminating, purifying, and most energetic character, as is fire. The external emblem of fire accompanied the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of pentecost, probably to mark more clearly the fulfilment of this promise; but at other times, even when the baptism of the Spirit was followed by miraculous gifts, there was no visible sign accompanying his descent. However, though the visible symbol of "fire" does not now accompany the gift of the Spirit to the soul of the believer, as it did on the day of pentecost, such gift "is yet the mighty and transforming *baptism of fire*, that is, his influences are fitly represented by that powerful and purging element, being the application of a divine energy

is soft grass to walk on, the sandals are taken off, and the servant carries them in his hand." This practice strikingly illustrates Matt. iii. 11, where the Baptist is represented as saying, "whose shoes I am not worthy to bear."

to purge away sin, as fire removes those stains and pollutions which water cannot.”—*Watson. Whose fan is in his hand, &c.*] The language of this verse is highly figurative. The images employed are drawn from the eastern method of threshing grain, and of separating it from the chaff. Among them this labour was not, as with us, performed in a barn, but in the open air; usually in the field where the crop grew. An elevated spot in the field was selected, which was made level and hard by rolling. This was the threshing floor, to which allusion is had in the text. On this ground the grain was spread, and the kernels pressed out from the ear either by the treading of cattle, (usually oxen,) or dragging over it a machine to which heavy rollers were attached. These rollers seem



Eastern Threshing-floor.

to have been sometimes furnished with serrated teeth,—that is, teeth like a saw,—or wheels with teeth, so as to cut the straw at the same time that the grain was pressed out. It was, probably, to some such instrument that reference is made in Isa. xlv. 15. When the “wheat” had

## MATT. iii. 13-17.

13 Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.

been thus separated from the ear, the next process was to cleanse it from the chaff. This was done by tossing it in a current of air with a light sort of shovel, here termed "fan;" when the chaff, being lighter than the grain, was blown aside. The "fan" or shovel now in use in these parts is described as being usually of a semi-oval form, about three feet in diameter, made of hair or palm leaves. It is held by the rounded end. The original, rendered "purge his floor," means cleansing the grain, by separating it from the chaff, broken straw, and other refuse. When this was done the wheat was gathered into the "garner," or place where it was to be kept, by us termed the *granary*. *He shall burn up the chaff*] The threshing floor being in the harvest field, the chaff became mixed with the stubble, and was usually burned with it, as manure for the soil. The signification of the verse is, probably, as follows:—The "floor" represents the world or the church, the "wheat," the truly pious; the "chaff," the wicked; the "fan," the instrumentality which Christ will employ to separate the righteous from the irreligious; and the "unquenchable fire" to which the chaff should be subjected, the interminable punishment which awaits the finally impenitent.

## MATT. iii. 13-17.

Verse 13. *Then cometh Jesus from Galilee*] It is generally allowed that the word "then" does not here mean that Jesus came to John immediately on the conclusion of the above discourse, but merely that he came while



14 But John forbade him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me ?

John was as yet conducting his ministry in the neighbourhood of the Jordan. It is highly probable that at this time the Baptist's ministry was well advanced ; for St. Paul, in Acts xiii. 25, says, that as John "fulfilled his course, he said, Whom think ye that I am ?—there cometh one after me," &c. Now it is hardly reasonable to suppose the apostle would have said John "fulfilled" or accomplished his course, if it had been but very recently begun. Jesus had, until now, continued in private life at Nazareth. Mark i. 9.

Verse 14. *John forbade him, &c.*] Dr. Clarke says that the import of the original is, he earnestly and pressingly opposed him. *I have need to be baptized of thee, &c.*] That is, with a larger measure of that holy influence which Christ was to shed so copiously upon his true disciples. This sentence contains an explicit avowal of John's knowledge of the real character of Him whom he addressed, and an unequivocal acknowledgment of his superiority. The question may arise, How did John become acquainted with Jesus ? was it by the ordinary method of social intercourse ? No ; for he declared, John i. 33, that he knew him not ; but that He who had sent him to baptize had notified him that he on whom he should see the Spirit descend was the Christ.\* This descent of the Spirit, however, did not take place until after the baptism, and could not, therefore, have been any guide to John at this time. He must, consequently, have been

\* Some commentators think that John merely meant by this, that he did not know Jesus to be the Messiah. Perhaps it is more reasonable to understand him to say that he did not know the person of Christ.

15 And Jesus answering, said unto him, Suffer *it to be so* now : for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.

16 And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water : and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him :

made acquainted with our Lord's true character, if not his person, by direct revelation, as Simeon was.

Verse 15. *Suffer it to be, &c.*] Permit it to be so at present. *Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness*] "Thus it becometh" means that it was fitting and proper that this should be done ; though there might not have been any *obligation* to perform it ; at least, not that obligation under which all the Jews were placed to submit to the baptism of John, for Christ needed not "the baptism of repentance," not having sinned. "This fitness appears to have arisen out of the mutual testimony that John and Jesus were to give to each other's mission ; and thus a connection was established between the forerunner and Him whose herald he was ; so that the person to whom John gave testimony as Messiah could not be mistaken." "All righteousness" may import every religious institution or appointment, of which John's baptism was one, and which Jesus honoured by receiving.

Verse 16. *Jesus—went up straightway out of the water*] Or, "*from the water,*" as the original may be well interpreted. "Straightway" means *immediately, directly* *The heavens were opened unto him*] Luke says (iii. 21) th's circumstance took place while Jesus was praying ; on which a pious commentator remarks, "Prayer is the true key to open heaven." The expression, "The heavens were opened," is one that commonly denotes the appearance of the clouds during lightning, at which time the

17 And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

expanse above seems to open. "When a meteor, or any extraordinary appearance falling from the clouds or from the higher regions of the atmosphere occurred, the Jews usually described it by the phrase, 'the heavens were opened.'"—*Watson*. It is not certain whether the words, "unto him," have reference to Christ or to John, though the majority of commentators apply them to the latter. *He, John, saw the Spirit descending like a dove*] Expositors are not agreed whether the "Spirit" came down upon Christ in the form of a dove, or merely with that peculiar *hovering motion* which distinguishes the descent of that bird. Luke indeed says (chap. iii. 22) that he descended "in a bodily shape like a dove," but it is urged that the original may mean no more than a defined, visible appearance; and that the comparison may be between the *motion* of this appearance in its descent, and the motion of the dove when alighting. A literal interpretation of Luke seems, at least, as probable as the other theory. Whichever view may be adopted, the result will be the same, for the *idea* of a dove was strongly excited in the mind of John. We are not to suppose that any moral change was at this time wrought in the disposition of Christ; he was now, as he had ever been since his assumption of the human nature, "holy, harmless, and separate from sinners." It may be, however, that this manifest shedding down on him of the Holy Spirit should be regarded as a consecrating or setting him apart to the work of man's redemption.

Verse 17. *A voice from heaven, &c.*] The voice of the Almighty Father, accrediting his eternal Son, now clothed in flesh, to his high office as "Mediator between God and

man." "The original is very emphatic :—'*This is that Son of mine, that beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*' The tense called the aorist is here used, which denotes past, present, and future time ; importing, therefore, 'in whom I am *always* well pleased.'" Because Mark and Luke give the divine affirmation in the second person, "*Thou art my beloved Son,*" &c., it is suggested by some commentators that the heavenly "voice" was twice heard, first addressing Christ, saying, "*Thou art,*" &c., and afterward speaking to John, saying, "*This*"—that is, Jesus—"is my beloved Son."\* From Luke iii. 23 it appears that our Lord now "began to be about thirty years of age,"—that is, he was almost thirty. This was the age at which the Jewish priests entered on their sacred duties. Num. iv. 3, 47. The place where these transactions occurred seems to have been "Bethabara, beyond Jordan," that is, east of Jordan.

\* Is it not probable that a multitude were present (Luke iii. 21) when our Lord was baptized, and that they, as well as he and John, either witnessed the descent of the Spirit, or heard "the voice from heaven," or both? It is true that none of the evangelists declare this to have been the case, but neither do they affirm the contrary. And if this were, as is generally supposed, the inauguration of Jesus Christ into his office as the Mediator, would there not be a propriety in its being a public transaction?

## LESSON X. [Date, A. D. 25.

*The temptation of Christ.*—MATT. iv. 1-11; MARK i. 12, 13; LUKE iv. 1-13.

MATT. iv. 1-11.

**T**HEN was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil.

## NOTES ON MATT. iv. 1-11.

Verse 1. *Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness*] The transaction here noticed seems to have taken place directly after the baptism of our Lord, for Mark (i. 12) says it was “immediately” after the performance of that rite. The situation of the “wilderness” into which he was at this time “led up” cannot be fixed with certainty, though it is generally supposed to have been the mountainous part of the desert of Judea, which is described as being “a most miserable, dry, barren place, consisting of high, rocky mountains, so torn and disordered as if the earth had suffered some great convulsion, in which its very bowels had been turned outward.”—*Maundrell*. It must have been a desolate, uninhabited spot, for Mark says, (i. 13,) Jesus “was with the wild beasts.” The “Spirit” by which he was “led up” was the Holy Ghost, by whose influence he was impelled to seek this solitary abode. St. Mark’s language forcibly expresses the strength of this divine impulse, “The Spirit *driveth* him,” &c. *To be tempted of the devil*] “We are now advanced to the record of a most awful and mysterious transaction, consequently encompassed with difficulties, defying the human understanding : to avoid which, several eminent persons, both ancient and modern, have thought that a *visionary scene*, not a *real event*, is here narrated.

But there is not the slightest intimation in the narrative that the temptation was such, and there are many strong reasons why such a view cannot be admitted. As to the assertion that the very form of expression shows that it is only a visionary scene, referring for similar expressions to Rev. i. 10 and Acts xi. 5, the latter of these has nothing in common with this of Matthew; and the former, though it bears some verbal resemblance to the parallel passage of Luke iv. 1, is really of quite another character. Similar expressions do indeed occur at Matt. xii. 28; Luke ii. 27; Acts viii. 29; and x. 19; but no one ever imagined the actions *there* described to be merely imaginary.” —*Bloomfield*. To “tempt” means to *try* or *prove*, also to *entice* or *solicit*, generally to do evil, as here. The word “devil” (Greek, Diabolos) is of the same import as the Hebrew “Satan,” and denotes an *adversary*, an *accuser*, &c. It is one of the names appropriated in the Scriptures to the leader of wicked angels—the great hater and opposer of God and man, through whose evil suggestions our first parents sinned, and thus introduced

—“death into the world, and all our wo.”

This temptation was part of our Lord’s humiliation, and during the forty days of its continuance (Luke iv. 2) his holy soul was subjected to the evil insinuations of this malicious fiend. He was thus “made like unto his brethren, being tempted in all points;” yet, by successfully resisting those temptations, he remained “without sin:” and inasmuch as “he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted;” Heb. ii. 17, 18; of which ability his victory over Satan is the positive proof. The temptations named in the text did not, seemingly, take place until the close of the forty days.

2 And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward a hungered.

3 And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.

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Verse 2. *When he had fasted forty days and nights* To “fast” is to abstain from food. It is probable that the “nights” are mentioned as well as the days, because, during their ordinary fasts, it was usual for the Jews to eat during the night. Luke says, however, that during this period our Lord “ate nothing.” Chap. iv. 2. This is not the only instance of so long a fast, for both Moses and Elijah went without food the same length of time. Exod. xxiv. 28; 1 Kings xix. 8. In all these instances the persons were, doubtless, miraculously sustained: it is fair to presume, therefore, that they suffered no inconvenience; indeed, in the case of Jesus it is expressly said, that “*afterward* he hungered.”

Verse 3. *The tempter came to him*] That is, Satan came to him, now presenting himself, probably for the first time, in a visible form,\* the previous temptations having been carried on in an invisible manner, as his wiles commonly are. It is a profound mystery by what means purely spiritual beings, good and bad, hold intercourse with the souls of men; but they certainly do commune with them, and exert a powerful influence over their de-

\* The compiler has prepared his notes on this subject in conformity with the views of the majority of commentators, especially those of his own church; though he frankly admits that he sees no evidence in the narrative of any visible manifestation of Satan. Might not the temptations have been powerful suggestions to the thoughts of Christ, as the temptations of Christians usually are?

cisions. *If thou be the Son of God*] It is argued by some distinguished critics, that because the article is omitted in the original, this phrase should be rendered, “*a son*,” instead of “*the Son*,” &c. This opinion, however, has been successfully controverted, and the reading of the text established. The question may arise, Is it likely that Satan knew the real character of our Lord? To this it is replied, He doubtless knew that the Messiah was promised to and expected by the Jews, and could not but have been aware that he was represented as of great dignity; but of his true nature as God and man united, he was necessarily, to some extent, ignorant; for in this respect “no one knew the Son but the Father.” Luke x. 22. Hence, not knowing how intimately, or to what extent, the human and divine natures were united, he probably hoped to seduce him into sin. The title by which he addresses our Lord he may have borrowed from the events of the baptism. *Command that these stones be made bread*] A literal interpretation of the original would be *loaves*,—that is, *loaves* of bread. Satan adapted this trial to the peculiar circumstances of Jesus, who, being afflicted with hunger, he might have thought would be more likely to fall in with such a proposal than with any other. Incitements to good or evil derive additional force from their seasonableness, a fact which the tempter well understood. It may be, too, that the devil, under the assumed character of an honest inquirer, sought to strengthen the temptation by insinuating his doubts whether he *were* indeed the Son of God, or had ability to perform the work suggested; thus seeking to provoke him to vindicate his right to that title by an act of omnipotent power: for if not *assured* who and what Jesus was, his principal object, next to the hope of seducing



4 But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

5 Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple,

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him into sin, would be to ascertain positively his real character.

Verse 4. *It is written*] Namely, in Deut. viii. 3. *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word, &c.*] The passage referred to narrates the manner in which the Almighty supplied the necessities of his ancient people in the wilderness by creating for them a new article of food (manna) when the usual sustenance failed them. And by its being here introduced to repel the temptation just presented, we are taught that we are not to seek to supply our wants by presumptuous or unjustifiable means, but thankfully to receive whatsoever God, in his own good time, shall provide for our relief. Hence it is evident that the language does not refer to spiritual food, but to that which is suited to the condition of animal life. The phrase, “every word which proceedeth,” &c., would be better rendered, “every thing,” &c.; meaning that every thing which God appoints for the purposes of life shall be made available to the end proposed.

Verse 5. *Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city*] By “the holy city” Jerusalem is intended, (Luke iv. 9; which was so called on account of its being the principal place of God’s worship. The word translated “taketh him up,” does not mean that Satan conveyed our Lord through the air, or bore him to Jerusalem in any miraculous manner. It merely signifies that he induced him to go, and conducted him thither. They went in company. The same word is used Matt. xvii. 1, “After six days

6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee; and in *their* hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

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Jesus *taketh* Peter, James," &c.; that is, he selected them to accompany him. It may be reasonably concluded, therefore, that the tempter, still in an assumed character, proposed to Jesus to accompany him to "the holy city," and that he consented, well knowing the character and design of Satan, yet meekly submitting to the whole process of the trial appointed by his heavenly Father. *And setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple*] That is, prevailed on him to take his station there. The "temple" was the most distinguished place for the celebration of divine worship. It is supposed by several commentators that by "pinnacle," here, some part of the king's gallery is meant, perhaps the south-east corner, where the depth to the bottom of the vale below was computed to have been about seven hundred feet. This gallery was in the outer court, on the south side of the sacred edifice.

Verse 6. *Cast thyself down*] Namely, from the place where he stood into the valley beneath. *For it is written, &c.*] Here Scripture is quoted by the tempter in aid of his design, with the hope, as it would seem, of leading to an unauthorized presumption of divine protection. The quotation is made from Psalm xci. 11, 12, and is, as will be seen on referring to that passage, a mutilated extract, Satan having taken no more than suited his purpose. He seems to have thus sought to convert a gracious promise of assistance to such as unavoidably fall into danger in the path of duty, into an argument for presumptuous dar-

7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

ing. We should never place ourselves in unnecessary danger, in the vain hope that God will keep us; he has promised all needful help to them that *walk in all his ways*, but there is no such promise to the audacious. The metaphor contained in the words, "He shall give his angels charge concerning thee, *and in their hands they shall bear thee up*," &c., is a beautiful comparison of the divine care and protection to the watchful vigilance and attention to the safety of their little ones which fond parents manifest when, in travelling with them, they lift up and carry them over the various obstructions which bestrew their path, lest they should stumble and receive injury. The epistle to the Hebrews (i. 14) beautifully intimates that the angels of God are "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation." It is the opinion of some that this occurrence took place at the time of the morning or evening sacrifice, and that Satan strengthened the temptation by urging on our Lord, that if he gave the required proof of his divinity, not only himself, but probably those present at the service then going on, might be induced to believe on him. He may also have pretended that non-compliance with the request would be an actual dishonouring of God, by arguing lack of faith in his promised protection.

Verse 7. *Thou shalt not tempt the Lord, &c.*] The word "tempt," here, means *to try, to put to proof*, not to entice to evil, for in that sense the Lord can neither tempt nor be tempted. When applied to God the word has always a bad sense, and generally conveys the idea of seeking from him displays of his power on occasions and in a way prescribed by ourselves. This may proceed

8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them ;

either from distrust or presumption, though it usually arises from the latter emotion. The passage quoted by Christ is Deut. vi. 16, where Moses says to the children of Israel, "Ye shall not tempt the Lord your God, as ye tempted him in Massah." The incident thus referred to was that in which the Israelites, being in want of water, "tempted" the Almighty by saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?" Exod. xvii. 7. It seems that this language was not so much the result of distrust as of a petulant desire for an exertion of the divine power at the time and in the manner they dared to prescribe. Now although, in a case of simple presumption upon divine interposition, the perverse temper manifested by the Israelites on the occasion referred to may be wanting, yet the *spirit* of their fault is involved in it ; a bold and unauthorized demand being made upon God in our own will for the exercise of his power.

Verse 8. *The devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain*] It is not positively known what mountain this was, though tradition has fixed on one now called Quarantania, situated between Jericho and Jerusalem, as the theatre of this transaction. It is the highest mountain in Judea. Ma ndrell says, "It is, as Matthew calls it, 'an exceeding high mountain,' and in its ascent difficult and dangerous. In its sides are several caves and holes, made use of anciently by hermits, and by some at this day, for places to keep their lent\* in." *And sheweth him all the*

\* *Lent*, a fast of the Romish and Protestant Episcopal Churches, kept in commemoration of the forty days' fast of our Saviour.

*kingdoms of the world, &c.]* Luke adds, “in a moment of time.” By “all the kingdoms of the world” here, it is highly probable that no more is meant than the several provinces and tetrarchies into which the ancient kingdom of David was now divided, which dominions were popularly called “kingdoms.” The word “world” is allowed to be sometimes used in Scripture in a restricted sense. Such is probably the case in Luke ii. 1, as well as here; and most assuredly in Acts xi. 28, for history shows that the famine there spoken of was limited to Palestine. From some of the mountains of the Holy Land these various kingdoms might be distinctly seen, as, owing to the general clearness of the atmosphere, the views are very extensive. Thus Moses saw from mount Nebo “the land of Gilead unto Dan, and all Naphtali, and all the land of Judah, unto the utmost sea,” the Mediterranean. Deut xxxiv. 1–3. The abbe Mariti, also, speaks of a mountain on which he was, which overlooked “the mountains of Arabia, the country of Gilead, the country of the Amorites, the plains of Moab, the plains of Jericho, the river Jordan, and the whole extent of the Dead Sea.” But supposing the text should be understood in a more extensive sense than is above suggested, then, as from such a height a vast and splendid landscape would be exhibited, the tempter might from such a scene take occasion to descant upon other and still more glorious kingdoms of “the world,” especially those comprised within the limits of the Roman empire, then at the height of its magnificence, and strongly urge the honour which would arise from their possession. In support of this argument it may be remarked, “that the Greek word rendered ‘to show,’ like the English verb, does not necessarily signify to exhibit to the sight, but also to describe and make known in

9 And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

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any mode."—*Watson*. By "the glory" of these kingdoms is meant their riches, honours, &c.

Verse 9. *All these things will I give thee*] According to Luke, (iv. 6,) the devil lays positive claim to the ownership of these kingdoms, and to a perfect right to dispose of them as he would; a falsehood worthy of the "father of lies," for God has never parted with the dominion of the universe, or any part thereof, as Satan's language would seem to insinuate. It is true that in John xii. 31, and xiv. 30, Christ titles the great enemy the "prince of this world;" and in 2 Cor. iv. 4, Paul terms him "the god of this world:" but in these passages "the world" denotes the "children of disobedience," that is, wicked persons, in whose hearts Satan is said "to rule," because their dispositions and habits are in conformity with his wishes, and opposed to the mind of God. The "tempter" seems now to have dropped his assumed character, and to stand before our Lord as nothing less than "archangel fallen:" hence, in his reply, Jesus addresses him by his proper name, which he had not hitherto done. It is not unlikely that this temptation was offered to Christ as the Messiah, though in accordance with the Jewish notion that his dominion would be an earthly one. Satan thus seems to have sought to excite ambition in Jesus' mind, and even to proffer his aid in bringing about the *presumed* object of the Messiah's mission; and all he asks in return is, that he shall be acknowledged the supreme lord. *If thou wilt worship me*] The word "worship" here implies not merely *obeisance*, or *homage*, but *adoration*—that is, religious worship, as is evident from our Lord's reply. The usual manner of rendering both, in the East, was the

10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan : for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

11 Then the devil leaveth him, and behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

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saine, namely, by prostration, or bowing down. Satan's object, then, was to induce Christ to commit idolatry, by rendering unto him divine honour.

Verse 10. *Get thee hence*] Away ! Begone out of my sight ! The command seems to express a holy indignation. This dismissal "shows that our Lord's submission to the humiliation and pain of these temptations had been voluntary ; and that they were endured, not for his own sake, but for ours." *Thou shalt worship the Lord, &c.*] This quotation is made from Deut. vi. 13, which the Saviour cites according to the sense, not using the exact words. The passage contains a caution to the Israelites to beware of idolatry, with a positive command that they should adore Jehovah only. The appropriateness of the quotation will be seen by every attentive reader. To "worship God" is to render him the sincere homage of our souls, gratefully acknowledging him to be the source of all excellence, and our rightful sovereign and lord, to whom unqualified love and obedience are due ; manifesting these dispositions by the usual acts of religious adoration, such as prayer and praise : in other words, to love and honour him. To "serve" him, is to fear him, and cheerfully to obey all his injunctions. This "worship and service" is obligatory on all men ; and some such homage, modified according to circumstances, on all intelligent creatures ; in default of which, they must bear the consequences.

Verse 11. *Then the devil leaveth him*] Luke adds, (iv. 13,)

“for a season.” From this it may be inferred that Jesus was afterward subject to other temptations from the same source, though of the nature or extent of them we are not informed. It would appear, however, from a comparison of John xiv. 30 with Luke xxii. 53, that toward the close of our Saviour’s ministration on earth he endured dreadfully severe conflicts with the devil. *Angels came and ministered unto him*] To “minister” is to *serve*. Whatever other service they may have rendered him, it seems highly probable that they supplied him with food, he being now “a hungered,” that is, hungry. Angelic ministry was subsequently extended to him after the agony in the garden, for we read that then “an angel from heaven strengthened him.”

This subject should teach us, among other things, 1st. That no man, howsoever holy, is exempt from temptation; yet we may comfort ourselves with the assurance that God will give us grace to bear, and finally to overcome, if we are faithful. 1 Cor. x. 13. “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you,” James iv. 7. 2d. That the best way to defeat the tempter is, to meet him with the “sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,” Eph. vi. 17. In every instance the devil was defeated by judicious quotations of Scripture. May we place a proper estimate on this rich treasure, and “hide” its holy precepts “in our hearts!” 3d. “That to be tempted [to the committal of] even the greatest abominations (while a person *resists*) is not sin; for Jesus was tempted to *worship* the DEVIL.”—*Clarke*. It may be also remarked, that our spiritual interests will usually be advanced in proportion to our trials and faithful resistance. James i. 2, 3



## LESSON XI.

[Date, latter part of A. D. 25.]

*John bears public testimony to Christ—Interview between Christ and Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael.*

JOHN i. 19-51.

AND this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou?

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## NOTES ON JOHN i. 19-51.

Verse 19. *This is the record of John, when the Jews sent, &c.*] “Record” here means *testimony*. The moderns limit the use of the word “record” to *documentary* or *written* evidence, but the term was formerly used to denote either written or oral testimony. John’s *personal* witness to Christ was, of course, verbal. By “the Jews,” whose messengers these priests and Levites were, the sanhedrim, or national council, is to be understood. Among the duties intrusted to this body was the charge of religion; it had, consequently, the power and right to examine into the pretensions and fitness of all religious teachers. John’s ministry had excited great attention, and from his answer, as well as from Luke iii. 15, it would appear that many of the people were inclined to consider him the Messiah, though neither his ancestry nor birthplace conformed with what had been predicted in these respects of Christ. The sanhedrim, conceiving it to be their duty, therefore, as well as right, to inquire into his authority, character, and objects, send a deputation for that purpose. It thus appears that this transaction bears the solemnity of an official investigation. The “priests” were the descendants of Aaron, brother of Moses; the

20 And he confessed, and denied not ; but confessed, I am not the Christ.

21 And they asked him, What then ? Art thou Elias ? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet ? And he answered, No.

“Levites” were the remaining persons of the tribe of Levi, and were assistants to the priests in the services of the temple. Together they constituted the Jewish clergy.

Verse 20. *He confessed, and denied not, &c.*] To “confess” is to *acknowledge*—to *admit*. “These words contain the strongest asseveration possible, since the two methods, assertion by affirmation, and by denial of the contrary, together with a repetition of the affirmation, are here united.” Hence Doddridge paraphrases, “He solemnly protested.” *I am not the Christ*] From this answer it would seem that the deputation had expressly questioned him whether he were the Messiah or not.

Verse 21. *Art thou Elias ?*] That is, *Elijah*, “Elias” being the Greek form of that name. It had been predicted by Malachi, (iv. 5,) that “Elijah the prophet” should appear “before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord,”—that is, before the advent of the Messiah. The messengers, having ascertained that John was not the more glorious personage, proceed to find out whether he were the precursor of the Christ. To this John answers, *I am not*] At first view, this reply may seem false, for John *was* the “Elijah” spoken of in the text, as our Lord himself has assured us : (Matt. xi. 4 ; xvii. 12, 13 :) yet it is not false *in fact*, for the Jews misconceived the prophecy, supposing that *the* Elijah who had been taken to heaven in a chariot of fire (2 Kings ii. 11) was the individual here spoken of, and that he would return to the earth in his own proper person. To

22 Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us: what sayest thou of thyself?

23 He said, *I am* the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias.

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this view John truly gave a decided negative. *Art thou that prophet?*] It is plain that this question cannot refer to Elijah, as that would involve a useless repetition. Some particular prophet is, however, evidently intended; and because the Jews had a tradition that Jeremiah would rise from the dead (Matt. xvi. 14) when the Messiah should make his appearance, and restore to them the ark and pot of manna, which he was supposed to have concealed, to preserve them from the Babylonians, some commentators think him to be the person here alluded to. The later Jews are also said to have interpreted Deut. xviii. 15, 16 as referring to that prophet; though our Lord was certainly the individual spoken of, as is clear from Acts iii. 22.

Verse 22. *Who art thou?*] What sort of person art thou? By what authority dost thou teach? Such seems to be the sense. *That we may give an answer, &c.*] Namely, to the Jewish senate. See note on verse 19.

Verse 23. *I am the voice, &c.*] Signifying he was the person represented by the "voice;" for a similar mode of expression see Rev. i. 12, where the apostle says, "I turned to *see* the voice,"—that is, the person whose voice he heard. "Esaias" means Isaiah, being the Greek method of spelling that name. The passage referred to is contained in the third verse of the fortieth chapter of that prophecy.

24 And they which were sent were of the Pharisees.

25 And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?

26 John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: out there standeth one among you, whom ye know not;

27 He it is, who coming after me, is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.

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Verse 24. *The Pharisees*] For a notice of this sect see on Matt. iii. 7, p. 165.

Verse 25. *Why baptizest thou then, &c.*] The Jews practised baptism as a religious rite long before the time of John; they, however, never administered it to persons of their own nation, but only to converts from heathenism. John, on the contrary, baptized *all*, which was justly regarded as a serious innovation in established religious customs. It is said that the opinion commonly prevailed among the people, that such of the ancient prophets as should return to the world at about the time of the Messiah, (Elijah and Jeremiah,) would be authorized to baptize the *Jews themselves*, for the purpose of introducing a new and improved religion. But as John had declared he was not either of these persons, the deputation were utterly at a loss to comprehend by what authority he had so far departed from existing usage in the administration of this significant rite. He had, indeed, told them that he was the person predicted by Isaiah as the herald of the Messiah, but they seem not to have understood him; the declaration of their own sacred writings being made of "none effect" to them, by their bigoted and foolish attachments to their traditions.

Verses 26, 27. *I baptize with water*] Meaning, probably, with water merely. *There standeth one among you whom ye know not*] That is, know not to be what he

28 These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.

29 The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world !

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really is—the Messiah. It is not necessary to understand John as saying that our Lord was there present, as the original may be as correctly rendered, “there is *dwelling* among you,” &c. John seems to admit that he had introduced a new order of things, but that still greater changes should be made by his successor. Christ was “before” John in order of being, having existed from all eternity, as well as in the superiority of his nature and office. *Whose shoe’s latchet, &c.*] See note on Luke iii. 16, p 175.

Verse 28. *Bethabara beyond Jordan*] Almost all the ancient manuscripts and versions, instead of Bethabara, have *Bethany*, which is doubtless the true reading. It is thought to have been in the allotment of Reuben, on the river side. “Beyond Jordan” here means *east* of that river.

Verse 29. *The next day*] The day after that on which the Jews questioned John. *Behold the Lamb of God*] “Lamb of God” means, lamb specially appointed by God. In the Mosaic law the Almighty appointed that at stated seasons, as well as occasional times, certain animals should be offered to him in sacrifice. The more numerous of these were lambs. From Lev. i. 4, and xvii. 10, 11, it appears that these offerings were made as propitiatory rites ; they were therefore called an atonement, or ransom. Compare Exod. xxx. 12 and 16. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews, however, declares, Heb. x. 14, that these sacrifices could not take away sins ;

30 This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me; for he was before me.

meaning that they possessed *in themselves* no atoning merit, but that they derived their efficacy from being typical representatives of that *greater sacrifice* which should be eventually offered for the sins of the whole world, in the person of our blessed Lord. Heb. ix. 13, 14. It should be observed, that as often as in Scripture the name Lamb is applied to Christ, so often the subject spoken of is the *death* which he underwent for men, as one suffering and dying *like a victim*. So John, in here terming him *lamb*, must have intended to represent our Lord as one *dying as a victim*, and that *in the place of others*; for he has subjoined the words, "which taketh away the sin of the world," by way of explication. The primary signification of the word rendered "take away" is, *to take away, by taking upon one's self*. Now, as to *bear one's own sins* denotes to be *punished* for one's own sins, so to *bear the sins of others* must mean to be punished for the sins of others, to undergo the punishment which the sins of others have deserved. This Christ did when he died, "the just for the unjust." "In support of the doctrine of the atonement," says Mr. Townsend, "there is more authority than for any other revealed in the Jewish or Christian Scriptures. It was taught in the beginning of the patriarchal dispensation, the first after the fall, in the words of the promise, and in the institutions of sacrifices. It is enforced by the uniform, concurrent testimony of the types, prophecies, and customs of the Jewish church. It is the peculiar foundation and principal doctrine of the Christian church, in all ages, which has never deviated from the opinion that the death

31 And I knew him not : but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.

32 And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him.

33 And I knew him not : but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.

34 And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.

of Christ on the cross was ‘the full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.’”

Verse 31. *I knew him not*] John here speaks of the time prior to Christ’s coming to him for baptism. It is not certain whether John is to be understood as saying that he knew not the person of our Lord, or did not know him to be the Messiah. *But that he should be made manifest, &c.*] To “make manifest” is to *make known*, that is, as the Christ. It is not said that this was the *sole*, but only that it was the *chief* end of John’s mission. He came, emphatically, to *bear witness* to the Saviour. *To Israel*] To the Jews.

Verse 33. *He that sent me, &c.*] Namely, God. *Remaining on him*] From this it would appear that the miraculous exhibition of the Holy Spirit, in whatever form he may have assumed, was not to vanish immediately, but to remain sufficiently long to prevent all suspicion of illusion, and to produce entire certainty that the person thus pointed out was indeed the Messiah. Reader, you have had brought before you the unequivocal testimony of this holy prophet to the divine character and benevolent work of the adorable Redeemer: do you receive it? O em-

35 Again, the next day after, John stood, and two of his disciples ;

36 And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God .

37 And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.

38 Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye ? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou ?

brace it heartily, lest by rejecting it you dishonour God, and bring destruction on yourself. See 1 John v. 10, 12.

Verses 35–37. *The next day John stood, &c.*] That is, “was there.”—*Bloomfield*. *And two of his disciples*] A “disciple” is a *learner*, a *follower*. One of these persons was Andrew, (ver. 40,) and the other is supposed to have been the author of this gospel, who usually conceals his name when speaking of himself. See chap. xiii. 23 ; xix. 26, 35. *Behold, &c.*] By this the Baptist intended to direct the attention of his own disciples to Jesus, not only as the great sacrifice for the sin of the world, but also as the complete teacher of heavenly truth.—*Clarke*. On hearing the remark of their instructor, the two disciples followed Jesus, being, probably, desirous of conversing with him. They seem, however, not to have had sufficient boldness to speak.

Verse 38. *Jesus turned*] Perceiving that they followed him. *What seek ye ?*] This question was not asked to obtain information, much less to deter them from accompanying him ; but was a kind invitation to them to express their wishes. Thus Jesus ever graciously regards even the first desires of the soul to become acquainted with him, and with the blessings of his salvation. *Rabbi, &c.*] “Rabbi” means *master* or *teacher*. “By calling Jesus



39 He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day : for it was about the tenth hour.

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teacher, these disciples showed that they sought instruction · and by asking him where he at present abode, that they desired private conversation.”—*Bloomfield*.

Verse 39. *Come and see*] A kindly answer, as it gave them an opportunity of making known their wishes at once. *Abode with him*] Remained with him *that day*. *It was about the tenth hour*] The Scriptures contain no notice of the division of the day into hours before the captivity. It is first noticed by Daniel ; and was doubtless one of those matters of useful information which the Jews acquired from their Babylonian conquerors. This division continued from that time to prevail among the Jews ; hence our Saviour asks, “ Are there not twelve hours in the day ? ” ( John xi. 9 ; ) obviously appealing to this as a well-known and undisputed matter. This partition of the day differs very materially from our own. We, by counting from points at all times fixed, namely, twelve hours from midnight to noon, and twelve from noon to midnight, obtain hours, both of the day and night, of equal length at all times of the year, and under the constant variations which occur in the length of the day and night, as the seasons advance and recede. But the Jews, as the oriental nations still do, commenced their day at sunrise, and closed it at sunset ; consequently their days and hours were much longer at one season of the year than at another. “ At the summer solstice the sun rises with them at five of our time, and sets about seven ; at the winter solstice it rises about seven, and sets about five.” The Romans divided their time as we do. If John here followed the Jewish computation of time, then this “ tenth

40 One of the two which heard John *speaking*, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

41 He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.

42 And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is, by interpretation, A stone.

hour" would be two hours before sunset; if the Roman method be adopted, it would be ten o'clock in the forenoon. The former is the more probable reckoning.

Verses 40, 41. *One was Andrew*] The other is supposed to have been the evangelist John. See on verse 35. *First findeth his brother*] From this it would seem that Andrew, on leaving Jesus, went immediately in search of his brother, anxious to make him acquainted with his having found the Messiah. So in the present day, every discovery of the gospel of the Son of God produces benevolence, and leads those to whom it is made to communicate it to others. Every one who has been brought to an acquaintance with God by the remission of sin, should endeavour to lead others to the possession of the same blessing, especially those of the same family. *We have found the Messias*] Or Messiah. For the import of this title, see note on Matt. i. 18, p. 91.

Verse 42. *He*] Andrew. *Brought him to Jesus*] Induced Peter to accompany him to Christ, that he too might, by an interview with our Lord, be satisfied that he was the Anointed. *Cephas*] This is a Syriac word of the same import as the Greek *Petros*, English, Peter. It was now affixed by Jesus to Simon's name, as expressive of certain qualities in his character, particularly his firmness and steadiness of purpose; traits for which he ulti-

mately became greatly distinguished. Simon seems to have been an entire stranger to our Lord, yet at first sight Jesus calls him by name, and affixes to that name another, so truly descriptive of that disciple's character, as to furnish strong proof of his own omniscience. *Which is, by interpretation, a stone*] This sentence is inserted by the evangelist as explanatory of the word "Cephas;" it is not, therefore, the language of Christ. The words, "by interpretation," mean the same as *being interpreted*. To "interpret" is to render the meaning of any word or discourse spoken in a foreign language into the language of the people to whom the conversation or writing is addressed. John "wrote his gospel in Greek, and in a Grecian city of Asia Minor, [probably Ephesus,] and for this reason was the more careful to translate into Greek the Hebrew, Chaldee, [or Syriac] names, given for a special purpose, whereof they were expressive. The sacred writer had a twofold view in this: 1st. To explain the import of the name; 2d. To prevent his readers mistaking the person spoken of. They all knew who, as well as what, was meant by the Greek word *Christos*, 'Christ,' but not by the Hebrew word *Messiah*. In like manner they knew who was called [*Petros*] 'Peter,' but might very readily have mistaken 'Cephas' for some other person."—*Campbell*. In the original the word "here rendered 'a stone' is in reality the proper name *Peter*, and should have been so translated." Simon is generally spoken of hereafter by his new designation of Peter, or Simon Peter. All these events seem to have taken place at Bethabara, or rather Bethany, as the place should probably be called.

Verse 43. *Would go*] Resolved to go. *Into Galilee*] "Galilee" was the northern part of Palestine. Jesus was

43 The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me.

44 Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

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at this time in Judea, which was the southernmost province. *Follow me*] Equivalent to saying, "Become my disciple." The invitation here given by our Lord to Philip (and by inference to Andrew and Peter) is not the call whereby they became his constant companions, (for they seem to have continued with him at this time but a short season,) much less is it the appointment to the apostleship, both which transpired at a later period and in different places. The "following" here spoken of merely denotes a profession of faith in him as the Messiah, or, in other words, becoming his disciples.

Verse 44. *Philip was of Bethsaida*] This "city" is generally supposed to have been situated on the northeast of the sea of Galilee, near the place where the Jordan enters that sea. It was originally a village, and was enlarged and beautified by Philip the tetrarch, who called it Julias, in honour of the daughter of the then reigning Roman emperor. It was probably the birthplace of Philip, Andrew, and Peter. Of this city no trace now remains, although it is supposed that its site may still be indicated. It was one of the three cities against which our Lord pronounced that memorable wo because of their unbelief, (Matt. xi. 21, 23,) which has long since befallen them. The profound obscurity which hides even the sites of at least two of these three cities, (Chorazin and Capernaum,) if not of Bethsaida also, is one of the most interesting circumstances which could be adduced in reference to them. It is contended by some authors that the location above pointed out cannot be that of the Bethsaida to

45 Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

46 And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see.

which Philip and the other disciples here mentioned belonged, because John says (chap. xii. 21) that Philip was of "Bethsaida of Galilee," whereas *this* Bethsaida was confessedly on the eastern shore of the Jordan, in the district of Gaulonitis. It is urged, in reply to this objection, that the district had formerly composed a part of Galilee, and though now severed from it, in conformity with the will of Herod, so as to form a tetrarchy for Philip, it was still *popularly* spoken of as "Bethsaida of Galilee."

Verse 45. *Nathanael*] This person is supposed to be the same with the apostle Bartholomew; for such of the evangelists as mention Bartholomew omit the name of Nathanael; while John, who mentions Nathanael several times, never uses the name of Bartholomew. *Him of whom Moses in the law, &c.*] The "law," here, means the first five books of the Old Testament, commonly called the five books of Moses. For some allusions to Christ in this portion of the sacred writings, see Gen. iii. 15; xxii. 18; xlix. 10; Deut. xviii. 18; in "the prophets," Psal. xvi. 9, 10, 22; Isa. vii. 14; ix. 6, 7; xi. 1-5; liii. 1, &c.; Jer. xxiii. 5; xxxiii. 15, 16; Ezek. xxxiv. 23; Dan. ix. 25, 26; Micah v. 2; Zech. vi. 12; ix. 9, &c. *Jesus of Nazareth*] So styled because of his having been brought up at Nazareth.

Verse 46. *Can any good thing, &c.*] The character of the people of Nazareth was proverbially bad; and it seems from this remark that they were despised even by

47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!

their fellow Galileans. (Nathanael was himself a Galilean, John xxi. 2.) It is possible, however, that Nathanael did not intend so much to reflect on the general character of the people of Nazareth, as to express his opinion that no prophet, much less the Messiah, should come from that place; using the phrase "good thing" in its highest possible sense. See Jer. xxxiii. 14, 15. Persons frequently suffer their minds to become prejudiced on a subject, and then determine for or against it without examination. So, in this instance, did Nathanael. This, however, is not the most prudent course, especially in reference to so important a subject as that of religion. *Come and see*] This was a much better way to win over Nathanael than to sit down and argue with him about the possibility that "a good thing" might "come out of Nazareth." It was a simple request that he should go and examine for himself. Philip's reply is said to be equivalent to our phrases, "Judge for yourself;" "Seeing is believing," &c.

Verse 47. *An Israelite indeed*] So called, because he was not only an Israelite by birth, as all the Jews were, but because his dispositions and conduct were such as became the spiritual privileges he possessed; a truly pious man. Rom. ix. 6. Bloomfield remarks, that "the appellation, *true Israelite*, (denoting one who imitates the virtues of the patriarch Israel,) was given among the Jews to persons remarkable for probity." *In whom is no guile*] "Guile" is *hypocrisy, deceit*. He was, then, sincere, upright. What an honourable character is here given to this pious Jew, by Him "who knew what was in man!" There is a sense in which it may be truly said,

48 Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee.

49 Nathanael answered and said unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.

“An honest man’s the noblest work of God,”

and that is of one of tried integrity toward men, and of unfeigned piety toward the Most High. Reader, how is it with thee?

Verse 48. *Whence knowest thou me?*] Nathanael was not at all acquainted with Jesus, and supposed himself to be equally unknown by him. Hearing Christ express the above favourable estimate of him, (to the truth of which his own conscience must have testified,) he very naturally inquired by what means he knew him, evidently supposing that some person had given him information. *Before Philip called thee*] Verse 45. *When under the fig-tree*] Fig-trees abounded in Palestine; and it was customary for the inhabitants to spend much of their leisure time under their grateful shade. [This custom still prevails.] Such places were also favourite retreats for religious retirement and devotion. Unmolestedly to “sit under one’s vine and fig-tree” is a well-known and beautiful image of peace and safety. *I saw thee*] Certainly not by means of the natural vision, for the whole narrative precludes the idea of Christ’s being bodily present with Nathanael. What the circumstances were to which our Saviour alludes we are not informed; but Nathanael’s reply bespeaks the fullest conviction that they could be disclosed only to the eye of God, and, of course, that Jesus really possessed the divine nature. “All things are opened unto the eyes of Him.” Heb. iv. 13.

50 Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig-tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these.

51 And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.

Verse 49. *Son of God—King of Israel*] Both these phrases belonged to the Messiah, and are to be understood as expressing Nathanael's conviction that Jesus was indeed that person. He was convinced of this by the intimate knowledge which our Lord had displayed.

Verses 50, 51. *Thou shalt see greater things*] Our Lord seems to intimate that he would give even more indubitable proofs of being "the Son of God" than he had yet displayed. He probably refers to the miracles he would thereafter perform. *Verily, verily*] A solemn asseveration, denoting the truth and certainty of that which is spoken. *Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, &c.*] Dr. A. Clarke thinks this to be a figurative expression; and that by "heaven being opened" may be meant that a clear and abundant revelation of God's will should be now made known to men, and the mysteries relating to their salvation and glorification fully revealed: that by "the angels of God ascending and descending" is meant, that a perpetual intercourse should now be opened between heaven and earth; and that the whole concerns of human salvation shall be carried on, from henceforth, through the "Son of man," as mediator. "What a glorious view does this give us," he remarks, "of the gospel dispensation! It is heaven opened to earth, and heaven opened on earth."



## LESSON XII.

*Jesus attends a marriage-feast at Cana, where he performs his first miracle—He goes to Capernaum, and thence to Jerusalem, to attend the feast of the passover*

JOHN ii. 1-25.

AND the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there.

## NOTES ON JOHN ii. 1-25.

Verse 1. *The third day*] The third day after Christ's arrival in Galilee from Bethany. *There was a marriage*] Rather, a marriage-feast. Among the Jews the nuptial festivities continued seven days, excepting the bride were a widow, in which case Brunings states that the feast was limited to three days. *At Cana in Galilee*] The words, "in Galilee," are added to distinguish this Cana from a town of the same name in the territory allotted by Joshua to the tribe of Asher, (Josh. xix. 28,) situated not far from Sidon. The Cana here spoken of was in the allotment of Zebulun, about six miles north or north-east of Nazareth. Mr. G. Robinson, under date of 1830, says, "It is a neat village, pleasantly situated on the descent of a hill, facing the south-west, and is surrounded by plantations of olive and other fruit-trees. In one of these enclosures we were invited by the owner to take up our quarters during the few hours we intended to sojourn in the village. The inhabitants supplied us with bread, fruit, and cheese. We had 'no wine,' but the water was delicious. It came from the only large spring in the neighbourhood, and must therefore have flowed from the same fountain at which water was drawn at the time of our Saviour's visit. [The Pictorial Bible states that the



Well at Cana.\*

spring is about a quarter of a mile from the village.] Several young women were filling pitchers for the afternoon's meal. These pitchers are about two feet high, of compact limestone, with which the country abounds." The population of Cana is about three hundred, chiefly Catholics. *The mother of Jesus was there*] It is not improbable that she was a relative of the family in which the marriage took place. She seems, from her anxiety about the wine, verse 3, to have had some care of the feast. As Joseph, the husband of Mary, is not mentioned

\* The above cut of the well near "Cana of Galilee" may be taken as an interesting illustration of the better sort of wells in Western Asia. Wells of this very superior description are not, however, very common in the East.—*Pict. Bible.*

2 And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage.

3 And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine.

4 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.

during the whole course of our Lord's ministry, it is highly probable that he died before it commenced. It is morally certain this was the case prior to the crucifixion, or our Lord would scarcely have consigned his mother to the care of the beloved apostle. John xix. 26, 27.

Verses 2, 3. *His disciples*] These appear to have been Andrew, John, (allowing him to be the "disciple" who, with Andrew, followed our Lord,) Peter, Philip, and Nathanael. John i. 40-45. *They have no wine*] Bloomfield says that the original is equivalent to, "the wine is falling short:" it is evident from verse 10 that wine was used, other than that produced by Christ.

Verse 4. *Woman*] However harsh and disrespectful this style of address may seem to us, it was by no means so regarded in the East at that time, neither is it now. Jesus uses it to his mother on another occasion, when his respect and tenderness were beyond all question. John xix. 26. Xenophon puts the same language into the mouth of a Persian chief, when consoling a captive lady of the highest rank; and Augustus is made to use it to Cleopatra. It may, therefore, be considered as equivalent to *Madam*. See Orient. Lit., No. 1337. *What have I to do with thee?*] Rather, "What hast thou to do with me?" a common form of rebuke for intermeddling in another's business. The reproof was probably modified by the tone of voice, and so softened into a mild rebuke for interfering with him in a matter where her parental claims could have

5 His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do *it*.

6 And there were set there six water-pots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece.

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no authority over him. *Mine hour is not yet come*] "These words evidently mean, 'The right time for my doing what you suggest is not yet come;' which implied that *he alone* was the proper judge of that season, and would seize it when it arrived; thus mixing comfort with the reproof."—*Bloomfield*. The wine was probably not yet quite exhausted; and so long as any remained, it was best to defer his intended interposition, that so the reality of the miracle might be placed beyond all suspicion. "When our Lord had given this gentle rebuke, with the authority of a prophet sent from God, he suffered her request to sway him, and seems to have made the first display of his glorious power partly in deference to her."—*Abp. Newcome*.

Verses 5, 6. *Whatsoever he saith, &c.*] This direction shows that the mother of Jesus expected he would supply the lack of wine; which is proof that she did not understand him as refusing her implied request, but only as intimating that he would wait for the proper moment in which to manifest his power. *There were six water-pots of stone*] Probably what we should call stone-ware, "from which the water was poured or drawn into lesser vessels for washing the hands, &c., or for cleansing utensils." In the extract from Mr. Robinson, contained in note on verse 1, it is stated that the water-pots now in use in this place are made of limestone; and Dr. Richardson observes, that in a small Greek chapel here he was shown an old stone pot, also of limestone, which the priest told

7 Jesus saith unto them, Fill the water-pots with water. And they filled them up to the brim.

8 And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it.

him was one of the *original pots that contained the water made into wine!* Doubtful. *After the manner]* In conformity with the usual custom. *Of the purifying of the Jews]* "Purifying," here, means cleansing or washing. The Levitical law required multifarious ablutions, both of persons and things, to prevent or remove ceremonial defilement; and the traditionary observances of the Pharisees had greatly increased the number, and of consequence rendered a copious supply of water at all times necessary. Matt. xv. 2; Mark vii. 1-4; Luke xi. 38, 39. Perhaps a clearer rendering of the text would be, "for the purpose of purifying, according to the rites of the Jews." *Two or three firkins apiece]* The proper measure of the word rendered "firkin" is unknown. Dr. Campbell reads *bath* instead of "firkins," because the same Greek word is so translated 2 Chron. iv. 5. The "bath" is generally supposed to have contained about thirty quarts.

Verse 7. *Jesus saith unto them]* Unto the servants. *Fill the water-pots]* It is probable that the wine originally provided was now all consumed. *To the brim]* To the top. Perfectly full. The order to fill them "with water," which was fully obeyed, rendered all deception, by the procuring and introducing of wine, impossible.

Verse 8. *Draw out now]* The miracle was immediately wrought, for as soon as the water-pots were filled, the servants were directed to "draw out" and carry the newly-made wine to the "governor of the feast," that he might, as usual, taste it, and decide whether it were suitable to place before the guests. *The governor of the*

9 When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was, (but the servants which drew the water knew,) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom,

10 And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: *but* thou hast kept the good wine until now.

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*feast*] "At nuptial and other feasts it was usual to appoint a person to superintend the preparations, to pass around among the guests to see that they were in want of nothing, and to give the necessary orders to the servants. Ordinarily he was not one of the guests, and did not recline at table with them; or, at least, he did not take his place among them until he had performed all that was required of him."—*Horne*. The existence of such an officer among the Jews is rendered unquestionable by the following quotation from chap. xxxii. 1 of the apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus: "If thou be made the master of a feast, lift not thyself up, but be among them as one of the rest: take diligent care of them, and so sit down. And when thou hast done all thine office, take thy place that thou mayest be merry with them, and receive a crown for the well ordering of the feast."

Verses 9, 10. *Knew not whence it was*] Then the judgment he pronounced (verse 10) was an impartial one. *Bridegroom*] The man newly married. *Every man at the beginning, &c.*] That is, it is customary to produce the best wine at the beginning of an entertainment. *When men have well drunk*] Campbell says, "The Greek word frequently denotes, in Scripture, and sometimes in other writings, no more than to drink freely, though not to intoxication." See Gen. xliii. 34. It will be remembered that the "governor" is not speaking of

11 This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory ; and his disciples believed on him.

the guests then and there present, but only makes a general observation as to what was usual on such occasions. *Which is worse*] Literally, *less* [good.] *The good wine*] This shows not only that the liquor now presented had all the qualities of *real wine*, but that it was superior in flavour to that which they had been drinking. It cannot be insinuated, with any show of reason, that the ruler's taste was vitiated by excessive drinking, so as not to know water from wine, for, as Theophylact remarks, "those who were intrusted with this office were obliged to observe the strictest sobriety, that they might be able properly to direct the whole business of the entertainment."

Verse 11. *This beginning of miracles*] "Beginning" means *first*: it is Christ's first miracle. A "miracle," according to Mr. Watson, may be philosophically defined to be "an event which does not follow from any of the regular laws of nature, or which is inconsistent with some known law of it, or contrary to the settled constitution and course of things." In the present case the miracle consisted in converting water into wine by the mere exercise of Christ's will. *Manifested forth his glory*] "Manifested forth" means *made known*; and "his glory" denotes the divine perfections which he possessed, and which were rendered apparent by this exhibition of his power. It is not improbable, that although the servants only were at first acquainted with the change of the water into wine, the remarks of the "governor of the feast" (verses 9, 10) may have led to an inquiry as to whence the "good wine" was obtained, and the development of

12 After this he went down to Capernaum, he, and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples; and they continued there not many days.

13 And the Jews' passover was at hand; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem,

14 And found in the temple those that sold oxen, and sheep, and doves, and the changers of money sitting:

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the whole matter. If so, not only the disciples and servants, but also the entire company, would become knowing to the fact. *His disciples believed on him*] As they had "believed" before, the meaning must be that they now believed with a more full and steadfast faith.

Verse 12. *Capernaum*] The exact location of Capernaum is unknown. It is generally supposed, however, to have stood on or near the north-western shore of the sea of Galilee. This city was subsequently peculiarly favoured with the presence and teachings of our Lord, and within its limits or neighbourhood many of his most mighty works were performed. *His brethren*] Who these "brethren" were cannot be satisfactorily determined, from the extreme latitude which was given to that term of relationship among the Jews. It is more than probable, however, that the persons here referred to were sons of Joseph and Mary, and consequently the "brethren" of Christ, in the proper sense of the word.

Verses 13, 14. *The passover*] See note on Luke ii. 41, p. 145. *Found in the temple*] This is not spoken of the sacred edifice, but of the outer court, by which the temple proper was encompassed, and which was known as the court of the Gentiles. This area was much larger than the others, and accounted less sacred by the Jews, who did not hesitate to permit animals designed for the sacrifices and offerings prescribed by the law to be exposed



for sale within its limits. For such dealings a large place suitably furnished was appropriated in the southern part of this court. Besides animals and birds, whatever else might be required for offerings and sacrifices was sold in this market, such as salt, wine, oil, &c. This irreverent freedom was taken under the plea of public convenience. The number of victims sacrificed at each of the principal feasts must have been immense; Josephus states that the lambs slain for the passover alone amounted one year to the number of two hundred fifty-six thousand five hundred. The "sheep, oxen,\* and doves" were not designed for use at the *passover*, when lambs alone were slain, (and which feast lasted but for one evening,) but for the customary sacrifices and offerings, of which great numbers were presented about this time. *The changers of money*] These were persons whose business it was to exchange foreign into Hebrew coins—what we should term brokers. It was required of each adult male Jew to pay half a shekel yearly (about thirty cents of our money) for the support of the temple, which money was always expected to be paid in Jewish coin. This contribution became due on the fifteenth of the month Adar, but it is supposed was in many cases not paid until the middle of the following month, which would be the time of the passover. The country being now under the dominion of the Romans, as it had formerly been under that of the Greeks, the ordinary currency chiefly consisted of Greek and Roman money. This not being received at the temple in payment of the annual "tribute," it became necessary to exchange such coin into Jewish; and as a matter of accommodation to the people, the "money-

\* Oxen, properly speaking, could not be offered in sacrifice. The preferable word would therefore be *cattle*.

15 And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables;

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changers," as well as the dealers in sacrificial animals, were allowed to conduct their business within the precincts of the temple. The brokers are said to have charged about one cent for exchanging coin to the value of half a shekel; and as the influx of Jews from abroad was very great at the principal feasts, and especially so at the passover, it is suggested that the occupation of the money-changers was a very gainful one. The practice of appropriating a portion of this hallowed spot to the purposes of traffic was highly irreverent, and must have greatly incommoded the proselytes from Gentilism in their devotions, as they were in consequence obliged to conduct them amid the noise and bustle of bargaining, and the lowing and bleating of sheep and cattle. This transaction is not to be confounded with that recorded Matt. xxi. 12, 13; Mark xi. 15-17; Luke xix. 45, 46; as that took place but a few days before the crucifixion, this in the beginning of our Saviour's ministry.

Verse 15. *A scourge*] A whip. *Of small cords*] The original implies that this "scourge" was made of twisted rushes, "such as were used for tying up the cattle." They were, probably, picked up by him in the court. It is not likely that much, if any use was made of the whip; it seems to have been merely designed to show his authority and determination in rescuing the holy place from such profanation. The traffickers, conscious of the impropriety of their proceedings, and struck by the dignity and energy of our Lord, would not hesitate to obey his injunctions. *Poured out the changers' money*] According

16 And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house a house of merchandise.

17 And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thy house hath eaten me up.

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to Bloomfield, the original signifies *small coin*. "The most ancient coins, (especially the oriental,) being of a square form, admitted of being *cut*, so as to form the esser kind of money."

Verse 16. *Make not my Father's house, &c.*] The tabernacle first, and afterward the temple, was called "God's house," on account of the shechinah, or visible symbol of the divine presence, having taken up its abode therein, so that the sacred edifice was regarded as being inhabited by Jehovah. A "house of merchandise" is a place for traffic. The worship of God should always be conducted with seriousness, and our deportment, when within the house consecrated to his service, should be reverent. When at such times vain and worldly thoughts obtrude themselves, "let us, with a holy and indignant zeal, chase them out, for these as much desecrate the sacred place and hour as did the cattle, sheep, and doves, and the tables of the money-changers, the Jewish temple. 'God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him.'"

Verse 17. *It is written*] In Psal. lxi. 9. *The zeal of thy house, &c.*] The word rendered "zeal," as applied to the mind, signifies any warm emotion or affection. The phrase, "*zeal of thy house*," applied to Christ, denotes his earnest desire for the honour and purity of the temple. The Jews had desecrated and polluted the holy place by making it "a house of merchandise." *Hath*

18 Then answered the Jews, and said unto him, What sign showest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?

19 Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.

*catch me up*] Hath preyed on my spirits, as fire preys on and consumes that which is subjected to it. The fervid desire which Jesus felt for the honour of his Father, and the proper regulation of all things belonging to his worship, was as a "fire in his bones;" and, impelled by this holy zeal, he sought to rescue the temple from such an unauthorized and unsuitable use.

Verse 18. *Then answered the Jews*] Probably such official persons, as the phrase commonly denotes. See John i. 19; vii. 13, and elsewhere. *What sign showest thou?*] "Sign," here, has the sense of *miracle*. John vi. 30, 31. These "Jews" seem to have supposed that our Lord might act from divine authority; but not being fully satisfied of this, they demand of him the performance of some miraculous work in attestation of his mission. One reason why they demanded this may be, that the ancient ambassadors from God were usually accredited to the people by their ability to perform "wonderful works;" it was, therefore, a kind of evidence to which they had been accustomed, and which they naturally sought. Another reason, possibly, was, that they considered ~~as~~ purging the temple a reflection on *them*, which they were not disposed to put up with, unless he could prove that he had a *right* to act as he had done. He acted from his own underived authority.

Verse 19. *Destroy this temple*] Meaning "his body."

Verse 21. *In three days I will raise it up*] Referring to his resurrection, when this assertion was fulfilled. In

20 Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?

answering the question of the Jews, Jesus adopted a figurative mode of speech very common among that people, by which the human body was spoken of as a *house* or *temple*, as being the residence of the immortal soul. 2 Cor. v. 1. By a similar figure, Christians are called the "temple of God," because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. 1 Cor. iii. 16; vi. 19. The Saviour probably used this allegorical style in order to excite more strongly the attention of the people; and when he uttered the words, "Destroy this temple," doubtless accompanied them by some significant action whereby they might have understood him as referring to himself. The figure was probably suggested by the subject on which they were then speaking—the temple, within the precincts of which they stood. Some commentators have construed our Lord's language into a declaration that the Jews *would* "destroy his body,"—that is, take his life; it seems much better to interpret it hypothetically—*If* ye should destroy, &c.

Verse 20. *Forty and six years was this temple, &c.*] Rather, "forty and six years *hath* this temple *been* in building," for it was not entirely finished until about A. D. 65. From this reply it may be inferred either that Christ's reply was misunderstood or perverted; most probably the latter; for if "the Jews" regarded his conduct as a condemnation of their course in permitting and fostering the evil he had sought to remedy, we may reasonably suppose they would be inclined to bring him into disrepute if they could. The temple in which this conversation took place was that commonly called the second

21 But he spake of the temple of his body.

22 When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said.

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temple, built after the return of the Jews from Babylon. This temple Herod the Great commenced to repair, or rebuild, in the eighteenth year of his reign,—that is, sixteen years before the birth of Christ. The main body of the building he completed in nine years and a half; yet the temple, including its out buildings, was not completed at the time of this interview. As Herod began to rebuild sixteen years before the birth of Jesus, who was now about thirty, the time which had been thus far occupied in the construction was, as stated in the text, forty-six years. *Wilt thou rear it in three days?*] This seems to be spoken in derision. As though they had said, “Herod and his successors, with all their wealth, have been forty-six years engaged in the erection of this building; how then wilt thou, a poor Galilean, ‘rear it in three days?’” Thus they put a very ridiculous construction on our Lord’s words, and probably appealed to it as proof that he acted without due authority.

Verse 22. *When he was risen his disciples remembered, &c.*] It is somewhat remarkable that, notwithstanding the frequent reference which our Lord made to his death and resurrection, the disciples seem never to have comprehended his meaning during his lifetime. The resurrection alone furnished the key to the right interpretation of those allusions. Their dulness of apprehension in this respect was probably caused by the influence of preconceived opinions, especially by the persevering tenacity with which they clung to the idea of a temporal

23 Now, when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast-day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did.

messiahship. *They believed the scripture*] Meaning the scriptures which particularly referred to the death and resurrection of Christ; for instance, Isa. liii. 8; Psal. xvi. 10; lxxviii. 18. *And the word, &c.*] Namely, the assertion contained in the nineteenth verse. Dr. Campbell translates this sentence, “they understood the scripture,” &c., remarking that the word *believed* here implies that they rightly apprehended. It is not insinuated that the disciples did not, before this time, believe the Scripture, or their Master’s word; but that they did not till now rightly apprehend the meaning of either in relation to this subject. “We may learn from this,” observes Mr. Barnes, “the importance of treasuring up the truths of the Bible now, even though they should not be perfectly understood: hereafter they may be plain to us. It is therefore important that *children* should learn the truths of the sacred Scriptures. Treasured up in their memory, they may not be understood now, but hereafter those truths may be clear to them,” and may lead their possessor to faith in Christ and ultimate salvation. In the beautiful language of a highly gifted lady, used in reference to prayers,—

“Such words allow’d upon the youthful memory to float,  
May be the waking chord to many a heavenly note.”

Verse 23. *In the feast-day*] The word “day” is not in the original, but is added by our translators, as is signified by its being printed in italic letters. “The expression, *during the festival*, better conveys the idea of the evangelist.”—Ripley. *Many believed in his name*] “In his

24 But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all *men*,

25 And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.

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name" means in him. Their faith, however, as appears from what follows, was only an external and historical, not an internal and saving one. The understanding was convinced, but the will remained unsubdued, and the heart unmoved. *The miracles which he did*] What these miracles were we are not informed; it is plain, however, from this place and chap. iii. 2, and iv. 45, that Christ wrought many miracles, the particulars of which are not transmitted to us.

Verses 24, 25. *Jesus did not commit himself unto them*] The word "commit," here, means *trust*; he had not confidence in them, and therefore did not openly and fully declare unto them his true character. *Because he knew all men*] This more than implies that the views of the "many who believed in him" were not of a right character. *And needed not that any man, &c.*] The *complete knowledge* of the hearts of men which is thus ascribed to Christ is among the proofs of his true, essential divinity, which cannot be set aside, for omniscience is the attribute of God alone.



## LESSON XIII.

*Conversation between Christ and Nicodemus.*

JOHN iii. 1-13.

**T**HERE was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews :

2 The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God : for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

## NOTES ON JOHN iii. 1-13.

Verse 1. *A man of the Pharisees, &c.*] That is, a man belonging to the sect of the Pharisees. For a notice of this sect, see on Matt. iii. 7, p. 165. *A ruler of the Jews*] A member of the sanhedrim, or principal judicial body of the nation. Nicodemus is twice mentioned after this in the gospel narrative ; once as opposing the restraints of law to the illegal and violent measures proposed by certain members of the sanhedrim, (John vii. 26, 32, 45-51,) and again on occasion of our Lord's crucifixion. John xix. 39.

Verse 2. *Came to Jesus by night*] It is supposed by some that Nicodemus went to Christ at night because he *feared* to call on him during the day, lest he should be reviled ; they thence infer that he was a timid, time-serving man. But may it not be as rationally concluded that he made choice of the evening because he would then have a better opportunity of conversing with Jesus ? Certainly his future conduct, so far as the sacred historians have noted it, displays nothing of the fearful, vacillating character that belongs to such a man as he is above suggested to have been, and the brief record of his conversation with the Saviour betokens the sincere, though

3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

measurably ignorant and prejudiced inquirer. His object in visiting Jesus seems to have been to receive instruction in the nature and objects of his mission. The interview was had at Jerusalem, to which city our Lord had gone to attend the passover. *Rabbi*] Master. A title frequently given to religious instructors. *We know thou art a teacher come from God*] The expression, "we know," &c., may denote nothing more than that it was a commonly-received opinion, and one in which Nicodemus concurred; some, however, contend that the pronoun "we" has reference to himself and fellow-rulers, and that the sentence is to be understood as an admission that the members of the sanhedrim generally were convinced Jesus was a divinely-authorized and appointed teacher, and was consequently "come from" or sent by "God." *No man can do these miracles, &c.*] Referring, probably, to the miracles alluded to chap. ii. 23, of the nature of which we are not informed. For the definition of a miracle, see note on John ii. 11, p. 217. The miracles of Christ were designed to be, and actually were, so many proofs of his superhuman character. *Except God be with him*] That is, unless God aid him, and work by him. It does not appear that Nicodemus considered Jesus to be the Messiah; of this he may have felt uncertain; and it is by no means improbable that *one* object of his visit was to ascertain that point in a confidential interview.

Verse 3. *Verily*] Truly, certainly: in the original it is *amen*. This is an affirmation denoting both the certainty and importance of the remarks which follow, and is said by Dr. Clarke to have been considered by the Jews of

equal import with the most solemn oath. *Except a man be born again, &c.*] The phrase, *to be born*, means to be brought into a state of conscious, active existence. This every individual of the human family is at birth. To be "born again," or a second time, is to have the affections of the heart and the principles of the life so changed, that the individual who is the subject of the transformation may be said to enter as upon a new life—to become a new creature. 2 Cor. v. 17. Ever since our first parents fell from the state of holiness in which they were created, every mere human being has entered the present world with a mind darkened and heart perverted by the baneful influences of sin. To this original, or birth sin, all who have arrived at years of accountability have added actual transgression; so that the declaration of Holy Writ, that "there is *none* righteous," (Rom. iii. 10,) is not an exaggerated statement, but a fearful truth. The destruction of these sinful propensities, by the renovating operations of the Holy Spirit, and the implanting in their stead, by the same divine agent, holy desires, appetites, and affections, so that the individual is enabled to love and serve God supremely, is termed being "born again." Verse 8; 1 Pet. i. 23. *Cannot see the kingdom of God*] The words, "kingdom of God," denote, 1st, that spiritual kingdom which Christ was about to erect in the world by the preaching of his gospel; and, 2d, the state of eternal blessedness in heaven to which the faithful and obedient members of his visible kingdom or church should be translated after death. To "see" this kingdom is to enjoy it, by being made partaker of its benefits; and *not* to see it, is to be deprived of its felicities. Thus, to "see death" is used for *to die*; to "see good days," for *to enjoy good days, &c.* Compare this clause with verse 5, and Matt.

4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

v. 8. The reason *why* an unregenerate man cannot "see" or enter into this kingdom is, that he has no fitness for t. Rom. viii. 7. It is not suited to his inclinations, nor he to it.

The attentive reader may be struck with the seeming lack of connection between the compliment of Nicodemus (ver. 2) and the remark of our Lord. Some commentators account for this by supposing that the Jewish ruler was not altogether free from the spiritual pride which so strongly characterized most of the Pharisees, and that Jesus, perceiving this, sought at once to humble the inflated feeling by positively assuring him that no man, Jew or Gentile, whatsoever might be his rank, reputation, or morality, could enter into his kingdom without experiencing a thorough change of heart. This change is attendant on and accompanies justification or forgiveness of sin, though it is not the same act, inasmuch as justification is a work done *for* us, the new birth a change wrought *in* us. To this astounding declaration Nicodemus remarks as stated in the fourth verse.

Verse 4. *How can a man, &c.*] It is judged, from this remark, that Nicodemus was advanced in years. The words, "born again," or similar phraseology, were frequently used by the Jews to express the conversion of a proselyte from Gentilism to Judaism. There could not, therefore, have been any thing in the phrase itself to perplex Nicodemus. His difficulty seems to have been owing to the *manner in which it was applied*. He appears to have rightly understood our Lord as intimating that he, and every other Jew who would enter that

5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

“kingdom of God” of which Christ spake, must be “born again,” as well as every proselyte from heathenism. This seems to have surprised him, for the Jews never used the expression in reference to one of their own nation, because they supposed that the Jew, by *his birth* and *circumcision*, was entitled to, and actually made partaker of, all the privileges of the people of God.

Verse 5. *Born of water and of the Spirit*] In this verse Jesus points out the agency whereby the change of which he had spoken might be effected. By “the Spirit” is meant the third person of the holy Trinity, who is usually recognised as the efficient agent of man’s regeneration. To be “born of the Spirit” is, therefore, to be made the subject of his renovating power. By being “born of water,” is meant water baptism, which is here solemnly declared to be the initiatory rite into the “kingdom of God,” or visible church of Christ on earth, which church is, as it were, the gate to the kingdom of glory. The reception of this rite is obligatory on all persons who profess faith in Christ; not, indeed, that baptism is *necessary* to salvation, for the Scriptures represent true faith in Jesus Christ as the only condition of our justification; but because it is an appointment of the great Head of the church, and can no more be *safely neglected* by an enlightened and obedient believer, than can any other requirement of God. It is suggested by some very distinguished commentators that the phrase, being “born of water and of the Spirit,” does not necessarily imply two different things, but may be understood of the Spirit’s influences being compared to water, on

6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh ; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

account of their cleansing efficacy, as in Matt. iii. 3, his operations are likened to the action of fire. The sentence, "cannot enter," &c., is equivalent to the words, "cannot see" the kingdom, in verse third. Whether persons who have been born of the Spirit, and who consequently have spiritual life, but who, through not understanding their Lord's will, or from various adverse circumstances, do not properly attend to the duty of baptism, may not enjoy his blessing, is entirely another question. Many such persons will doubtless be saved.

Verse 6. *That which is born of the flesh is flesh*] This seems to be spoken in reply to the question of Nicodemus, recorded in the fourth verse, "Can a man enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" and to convey an intimation that, *even if he could*, such second birth would produce no change in his moral character—he would still be carnal, and addicted to sin,—for "that which is born of the flesh is flesh,"—partakes of the nature which properly belongs to that of which it is born. The word "flesh" is here used in a twofold signification, first, as importing *human nature*, or a *human being* ; secondly, those *fleshly* or sinful propensities which are so congenial to fallen man. Thus the apostle Paul says, "The works of the *flesh* are manifest, which are," &c. Gal. v. 19–21. *Born of the Spirit is spirit*] That is, is spiritual and holy.

Verse 7. *Marvel not that I said, &c.*] Do not wonder, accounting it a strange thing, and hardly to be credited.

8 The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

It is probable that Nicodemus had not only manifested astonishment and perplexity, but also a measure of incredulity at what our Lord had said. Yet this astonishment ought not and would not have existed had he rightly interpreted the sacred writings, and diligently tested his own religious experience by them, for the doctrine was not a new one. See Psa. li. 2, 10; Ezek. xxxvi. 25-27.

Verse 8. *The wind bloweth, &c.*] By this illustration Jesus sought both to remove the unbelief of the Jewish ruler, and to instruct him more perfectly in the nature of the Spirit's operation. This he does by showing him, that however surprising the declaration he had made might be, it was not, on that account, to be doubted, for there are secret operations in nature which are equally mysterious, the effects of which are obvious to the senses; for instance, the blowing of the wind. By the wind's "blowing where it *listeth*," is meant (figuratively) where it *pleases*. Man feels it, he observes its effects; yet it remains unseen, and acts in a manner beyond his control and above his comprehension. So in regard to this great inward change; it was to be effected, not by the power or will of man, but by the energy of the Holy Ghost. John i. 13. And though the operations of the divine Spirit might be as incomprehensible as are the laws by which the wind operates in nature, yet the effect produced by his influences would be equally evident as those resulting from the action of that subtile but powerful agent. The character of those

9 Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?

effects is recorded Gal. v. 22, 23. See also Rom. viii. 16; 1 John iv. 13. It is in this respect that the Saviour says, "So is every one that is born of the Spirit." The figure used, remarks one writer, "is a very natural one, as the same word, in the original language, means both 'wind' and 'Spirit.'" It is possible that there is also an allusion, in the figure employed, to the *freedom* of that divine grace which, not confining the blessings of salvation to the Jews, extended them to the whole human race. "The investigations of Wolfe, Wetstein, and others, have proved that the Hebrews, and the ancients in general, were accustomed (by a sort of proverb) to signify any thing unknown or obscure by comparing it with the *wind*." —*Bloomfield*. In the same sense this figure is still used in the East. "When a man is unhappy because things come upon him which cannot be accounted for by himself or by others, it is asked, 'Do you know whence cometh the wind?' 'You say you know not how this matter will end: do you know in what quarter the present wind will blow the next moment?'" —*Roberts*.

Verse 9. *How can these things be?*] On hearing the illustration just noticed, Nicodemus, "partly perplexed with what seemed obscure, and partly confounded with what, though he may have understood, he was not prepared to receive, exclaims, with unfeigned surprise, 'How can these things be?' a mode of expression," observes Bloomfield, "which involves a modest request for further information." Dr. Clarke says of Nicodemus, "So intent was this great man on making every thing submit to the testimony of his senses, that he appears unwilling to believe any thing, unless he can *comprehend* it."



10 Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?

11 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.

Verse 10 *Art thou a master, &c.*] Rather, "*teacher,*" &c., for such is the import of the original. Campbell renders, "*the teacher of Israel,*" and observes, "the article here is remarkable. As a member of the sanhedrim, Nicodemus had a superintendency in what concerned religious instruction, and might, on that account, have been called 'a teacher of Israel;' but it is probably to intimate to us a distinguished fame for abilities in this respect that he is styled, by way of eminence, *the teacher.*" *And knowest not these things*] The "things" referred to are, the nature and necessity of the new birth. "There are frequent expressions in the Old Testament of similar import to the great truth which Jesus had been enforcing. It can scarcely be supposed that Nicodemus was ignorant of those passages; he had, however, failed rightly to understand them; and having been educated in the belief that the Jews, as such, were a holy people, the children of God, he never before, probably, had thought that a Jew of external probity might be destitute of true holiness."—*Ripley*. Just so with many of the formalists and unregenerate of the present day. They hear and read, but understand not. Hence the necessity of earnestly and sincerely invoking the influences of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 11. *We speak that we do know*] Dr. Clarke understands this to be a strong reproof, conveying an intimation that Nicodemus knew not the principles of the religion he professed to teach. If this be the true import of the passage, it may, by implication, be construed into

12 If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you *of* heavenly things?

a censure on all similarly ignorant teachers. The words, "*we speak*," are referred by some to Christ and his apostles, and to John; by others, to the three persons of the Godhead; but it seems more reasonable to understand Jesus, as many do, to speak of himself, though in the plural number, agreeably to the frequent usage of persons in high authority. This mode of speech he is known to have occasionally adopted. Mark iv. 30. This view seems strengthened by the fact, that in the following verse though dilating on the same subject, he assumes the singular number. *And testify that we have seen*] To "*testify*" is to *assert*, to *declare in evidence*. The idea seems to be, "I declare to you what I see and know to be true." And both this and the previous clause are expressive of that *complete knowledge* which our Lord, in consequence of his divinity, could not but possess. *Receive not our witness*] That is, do not believe our testimony. Does not the Saviour refer here especially to that class of teachers to which Nicodemus belonged—the Pharisees—who were ever, as a body, strongly opposed to him, and tried their utmost to bring him into disrepute?

Verse 12. *If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, &c.*] By "*earthly things*" may be meant *things done on earth*, such as repentance, regeneration, and the like; and by "*heavenly things*," in the clause following, the purposes of God for the salvation of men, involving the doctrines mentioned in the subsequent part of this discourse, as well as such other and even more mysterious truths as should hereafter be revealed, either by Christ himself, or through the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. Or, "*earthly things*" may denote such directions and in-

13 And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, *even* the Son of man which is in heaven.

structions as are comparatively *plain and obvious*; (as was the necessity, &c., of regeneration;) and “heavenly things,” such as are more difficult of apprehension. The words, “ye believe not,” probably import not so much a want of *faith*, as of a *right understanding* of what he said. *How shall ye believe, &c.*] That is, Ye will be much less likely to comprehend or receive, &c.

Verse 13. *No man hath ascended to heaven, but, &c.*] This does not mean that no human being excepting Christ had ever “ascended to heaven,” for Enoch and Elijah had been received there, and the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are frequently represented as being in that abode of happiness. Neither is it literally true that Jesus had ascended to heaven, for his ascension had not yet taken place. The phrase seems to be a sort of proverbial expression, denoting that no one but himself could explain the “heavenly things” to which he had alluded in the preceding verse. He is therefore metaphorically said to have “ascended to heaven,” because of the perfect knowledge he possessed of all the divine purposes relative to man’s salvation. An example of the mode of speech here adopted, which strikingly illustrates the present text, is recorded Deut. xxx. 11–14, where it is written, “This commandment which I command thee is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is *not in heaven*, that thou shouldest say, Who shall *go up for us to heaven*, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it and do it,” &c.,—that is, it is not so obscure, and difficult to be understood, that it needs a person of superior knowledge and discernment to comprehend and explain it; “but the

word is very high unto thee," that is, is perfectly plain and simple. The apostle Paul, speaking (Rom. x. 6) of the plan of salvation by faith in Christ, quotes this very passage to show the completeness and simplicity of the gospel scheme. To "ascend up to heaven," then, means to possess superior knowledge, to be able to teach the most sublime truths. By "*He* that came," &c., is meant our Lord Jesus Christ; and his having "come down from heaven," denotes his assumption of man's nature, and subsequent dwelling on earth. The appellation, "Son of man," is said to be a title designating the Messiah. *Which is in heaven*] This is a very remarkable expression. Jesus was then on earth conversing with Nicodemus: yet he *at the same time* declares that *he is in heaven*. Not, it is true, in his bodily form, but in his spiritual nature. To be in two or more different places at the same moment denotes omnipresence, an attribute which belongs only to Deity, and the possession of which is challenged as distinctly pointing out the great First Cause. Jer. xxiii. 23, 24. Jesus Christ must consequently be God. See also Matt. xviii. 20, and note, p. 386, vol. ii. Campbell renders, "whose abode is heaven," instead of "which is in heaven." Either rendering conveys the idea that Jesus was capable of conveying correct instruction on the "heavenly things" of which he had spoken, *because* of his intimate knowledge, resulting from his having "come from heaven."

## LESSON XIV.

*Conversation between Christ and Nicodemus, concluded.*

JOHN iii. 14-21.

AND as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up ;

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## NOTES ON JOHN iii. 14-21.

Verse 14. *As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness*] Our blessed Lord, having asserted (verse 13) his intimate knowledge of the mysteries of redemption denoted by the expression, "heavenly things," (verse 12,) proceeds to instruct Nicodemus in those sublime truths. In doing this, he directs his attention to one of the most interesting incidents in the Old Testament writings. In Num. xxi. 5-9, we are informed that the Israelites, having been directed to journey from mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, and so to compass the land of Edom, "became discouraged because of the way, and spake against God and against Moses;" as a chastisement for which, "the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died." On the repentance of the Israelites Moses was commanded to make an image of a serpent, and to elevate it on a pole, that the people might see it; and an assurance was given that whosoever, having been bitten, should look upon it, should be healed. He accordingly made such an image of brass, and set it upon a pole, "and it came to pass that if a serpent had bitton any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived,"—that is, was restored. The brazen serpent made on this occasion by Moses was preserved by the Jews until the time of Hezekiah, (a period of about seven hundred years,) who had it broken in

15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.\*

pieces, on account of its having become an object of idolatrous worship, and called it, by way of contempt, Nehushtan—a *brazen bawble or trifle*. 2 Kings xviii. 4. The “wilderness” in which the Israelites were at the time of the above transaction is supposed to be situate about the head of the gulf of Akaba; and both Burckhardt and Laborde bear witness to the extraordinary number of serpents which are found in that region. See also Deut. *Even so must the Son of man be lifted up*] “Even so” means in a similar manner, with a similar design. “The brazen serpent,” says Mr. Watson, “is supposed to be a type of Christ.” It is probably typical of him in these respects;—as it was “lifted up,” or elevated, so was he when suspended upon the cross; as it was constituted the medium, and the only medium, by which the afflicted people could be saved from temporal death, so is he the only medium through which the grace of endless life can be imparted to the sinner; and as in the type the blessing of renovated health was received through an act of obedient faith, so, in the antitype, the benefits of Christ’s suffering and intercession are received by the believer through a similar act of faith. See also John xii. 32. Although our Lord evidently refers, in this passage, to his crucifixion, it is by no means likely that Nicodemus so understood him at the time; but when that awful event was consummated, this prediction would doubtless recur to his mind, and afford him additional evidence that his beloved Master “knew all things.” The word “must”—“even so *must* the Son,” &c.—imports that it was destined Christ should thus die.

Verse 15. *That whosoever believeth in him should not*

*verish*] This is assigned as the reason why he should be “lifted up,” or crucified,—namely, to obtain salvation for them that would believe in him. Not, indeed, that his persecutors expected or designed that the benefits here contemplated should flow from his being thus “lifted up.” No, no; they merely aimed to remove out of the way one who was hateful to them; but He who “doeth according to his will” had determined to overrule their malice and evil acts for the promotion of his own glory and of the greatest possible good of the human race. To “believe in Christ,” in the sense of the text, is not merely to yield the assent of the mind to the truth of his word, but, in addition to such assent, to repose implicit confidence and trust in his promise to save. So soon as an individual does thus believe, that moment he will be justified from his sins. The word “perish” denotes the being excluded from the bliss of heaven, and condemned to everlasting punishment in that place where “their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.” Mark ix. 44; 2 Thess. i. 9. To this fearful doom all men are exposed, and the only way of escape is by believing on Jesus Christ, who by his vicarious death has made “a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.” Beloved reader, dost thou believe? If not, flee for refuge “to the hope set before thee” in the gospel; if thou dost believe, “hold fast thy confidence steadfast to the end.” *Eternal life*] An existence of unending happiness. The phrase, “eternal life,” does never barely signify perpetuity of being, but also includes that felicitous existence which springs from admission into the presence of God, and from the fulfilment to the redeemed of all those promises relative

16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

to a future life which are made in the New Testament.—  
*Watson.*

Verse 16. *God so loved the world*] As in the preceding verse Nicodemus was furnished with the reason *why* the "Son of man" should be "lifted up," so he is here informed that the world was indebted for this exhibition of divine mercy to the *love of God*; the benevolence of whose nature prompted him to compassionate the wretched condition of fallen man, and to adopt means for recovering him from his misery. The phrase, "the world," shows that this "love of God" was not a partial or limited compassion, but that the salvation to be obtained by the Saviour was to be proffered to every individual of the human race, in contradiction to the notion of the Jews that they, and such heathen as became proselytes to their faith, would alone be saved. See Luke xxiv. 45-47. *As to give his only begotten Son*] The word rendered "to give" signifies that God "hath delivered him to death;" which implies that he was a *ransom* for a sinful world.—*Bloomfield.* See also Isa. liii. 10; Rom. viii. 32. Critics assert that the words "only begotten" do not merely declare that our blessed Lord was the *only* Son of the Father, but that they also imply the unspeakable dignity of that Son, and the *intense* affection with which he was regarded by the eternal Father. This view should greatly exalt our conceptions of the nature and degree of that vast love to the human race which filled the divine bosom. It ought not to be overlooked that, as the Father "gave his Son," so that Son "gave himself." Gal. i. 4. The "gift," on the part of the Father, was not, therefore, the



act of a superior, which the inferior was bound to obey, but equally the act of both Father and Son. It may be worthy of remark, that mankind had no claim on God for redemption; the substitution of Jesus in the sinner's stead was a *free, unmerited* act of divine compassion, and the salvation thus procured must be received by the offender as a *gratuity*, or he can never be saved. Still, though it be an act of mere grace, the justice as well as compassion of God obliges him to confer pardon on every truly repentant and believing sinner. Dr. Clarke observes, that "such a love as that which induced God to give his only begotten Son to die for the world could not be *described*:—Jesus Christ does not attempt it. He has put an eternity of meaning in the particle 'so,' and left a subject for everlasting contemplation, wonder, and praise, to angels and to men." *That whosoever, &c.*] See note on verse 15.\*

\* "Mr. Nott, missionary in the South Sea Islands, was on one occasion reading a portion of the gospel of John to a number of the natives. When he had finished the sixteenth verse of the third chapter, a native, who had listened with avidity and joy to the words, interrupted him and said, 'What words were those you read? What sounds were those I heard? Let me hear those words again.' Mr. Nott read again the verse, 'God so loved,' &c., when the native rose and said, 'Is that true? Can that be true? God love the world when the world not love him. God so love the world, as to give his Son to die, that man might not die. Can that be true?' Mr. Nott again read the verse, told him it was true, and that it was the message God had sent to them, and that whosoever believed in him would not perish, but be happy after death. The overwhelming feelings of the wondering native were too powerful for expression or restraint. He burst into tears, and as these chased each other down his countenance, he retired to meditate in pri-

17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Verse 17. *God sent not his Son to condemn the world*] To "condemn" usually imports to sentence to some penalty. The original word is said to have here the sense of *punish* and *destroy*. Christ was not sent to *punish* and *destroy* the world. Dr. A. Clarke remarks on this passage, "It was the opinion of the Jews that the Gentiles, whom they often term 'the world,' were to be destroyed in the days of the Messiah. Christ corrects this false opinion, and teaches here a contrary doctrine. God, by giving his Son, shows that he purposes the salvation, not the destruction, of the world."

Verse 18. *He that believeth is not condemned*] That is, he is not in a state of condemnation, being justified from his sins. Rom. viii. 1. It is not, then, the fact of being a *Jew* which saves from condemnation, for the unbelieving Jew is held equally guilty with the infidel Gentile, but it is a confident reliance on the merits of Jesus Christ which delivers from the guilt and consequences of sin. *Is condemned already*] Continues under the condemnation and power of his sins. The unbeliever is here likened to a

vate on the amazing love of God, which had that day touched his soul; and there is every reason to believe he was afterward raised to share the peace and happiness resulting from the love of God shed abroad in his heart."—*Cot. Bible*, Am. ed. A similar incident is recorded respecting the first Greenlander who was converted to God through the labours of the Moravian missionaries.

19 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

20 For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

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criminal upon whom sentence has been passed, but in whose case such sentence has not yet been executed. *Because he has not believed, &c.*] Unbelief may truly be called *the great damning sin*, because it precludes the removal of all other sins. As Matthew Henry says, "It is a sin against the *remedy*." "In the name," &c., means, in Jesus Christ.

Verse 19. *This is the condemnation*] Meaning, is the *cause* of condemnation. *Light is come*] All the instruction that God gives us may be called *light*, as enabling us to see more clearly the path of duty. Eph. v. 13. But the word is here particularly used to denote the light of the glorious gospel, which is brought to us through the incarnation of the eternal Word, who is himself sometimes called "the Light," (John ix. 5,) on account of the illuminating influences which proceed from him. *Men loved darkness, &c.*] "Darkness" is here the emblem of spiritual ignorance and wickedness, as "light" is of spiritual knowledge and holiness. The text declares that ignorance of God and indulgence in sin are more agreeable to man's present fallen and corrupt nature, than are holy living and intimate communion with the great Author of his existence. *Because their deeds are evil*] That is, *sinful*. By men's "deeds" are probably meant not only their overt acts, but also the disposition which governs such acts, and which frequently has much to do with imparting to them their moral character.

Verse 20. *Every one that doeth evil*] That indulges in

21 But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

and practises wickedness, whether in heart or life. *Hateth the light, &c.*] Fears and shuns the light of God's word. There seems to be in this an allusion to the conduct of vicious men, who usually perpetrate their more daring acts of wickedness under cover of night, that they may the more readily escape detection. So in a moral sense, wicked men dislike and shun the holy truths and influences of the gospel, lest their "deeds," or evil dispositions and conduct, should be "reproved," or *discovered*, and condemned.

Verse 21. *He that doeth truth, &c.*] The word "truth" is here used to express the opposite of the word "evil" in the preceding verse; *doing* the "truth," therefore, signifies the practice of true uprightness, both toward God and man. Now a man who is thus upright does not shun the trial of his conduct by the strict rule of God's holy word. He rather "comes to the light,"—tests his disposition and conduct by that unerring touchstone of perfect righteousness. *Made manifest*] Made clear and plain. *That they are wrought in God*] This sentence probably denotes that such deeds are *agreeable* to God's will, meet with his approbation, and are consequently right; and also that they are wrought by the power and assistance of God. Phil. ii. 12, 13. Reader, of what character are *thy* works? Remember, *thou* art to "give an account of the deeds done in the body," and that thy future destiny will be determined by thy life here.

The consideration of our Lord's discourse with Nicodemus is now finished. It becomes every reader, as in the presence of Go<sup>d</sup>, and in view of the judgment-seat of

## LESSON XV.

*John the Baptist's last testimony to Christ—His imprisonment.*

JOHN iii. 22-36.

AFTER these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized.

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Christ, solemnly to ask himself whether he has experienced the change which is here so seriously and earnestly urged upon him. If not, he is in the "gall of bitterness," and should not rest until he can testify that a change is wrought upon his moral nature. "Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother."

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## NOTES ON JOHN iii. 22-36.

Verse 22. *After these things*] The "things" here referred to are the incidents recorded John ii. 13-iii. 21, and include the attendance of Jesus at the passover, his driving out from the temple the sellers of "oxen, sheep, doves," and the "changers of money;" the miracles he performed during the feast, and his conversation with Nicodemus. *Into the land of Judea*] Meaning, the country parts of Judea. As Jerusalem (where our Lord was when the "things" referred to in the preceding clause were performed) was in the "land of Judea," it is suggested that a clearer rendering would be, "into the territory of Judea," thus distinguishing the country parts from the metropolis. Some very eminent critics do so translate the clause. Although the particular part of the country to which Jesus went on leaving the holy city be

23 And John also was baptizing in *Ænon*, near to *Salim*, because there was much water there; and they came, and were baptized:

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not mentioned, it is probable that it lay north or north-east of the capital, as we next find him at Sychar in Samaria. John iv. 5. *There he tarried*] How long Christ and his disciples continued here we are not informed: some chronologers think about one month. It would appear from John iv. 1, 3, that when he left this place it was to avoid exciting the malice and opposition of the Pharisees. *And baptized*] It is not clear that Christ ever baptized with water, but his disciples did; John iv. 2; and their act, being by his authority and direction, is attributed to him, on the principle that what a man does by another is regarded as being done by himself. The "disciples" here named, it may be presumed, were some of those afterward known as apostles. The baptism here spoken of was assuredly the solemn rite by which men took on themselves the profession of discipleship; but of its mode of administration nothing is said, either here or elsewhere. Query. If the *mode* had been essential, would it have been left thus unsettled?

Verse 23. *John*] John the Baptist. *Ænon, near to Salim*] The exact location of neither place is now known; from the twenty-sixth verse, however, they would seem to have been on the western side of the Jordan. "Jerome places *Ænon* at eight miles south of Scythopolis, or Bethshean; *Salim* itself he places at the same distance from Scythopolis."—*Pict. Bible*. *Because there was much water there*] It cannot be supposed that John had left Bethabara or Bethany, (whichever the place should be called,) where he was engaged when last noticed by the evangelical historian, (John i. 28,) because of any scarcity

24 For John was not yet cast into prison.

25 Then there arose a question between *some* of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying.

of water to accommodate those who flocked to him; for as it stood directly on the river Jordan, there could have been no lack of the liquid element. He had doubtless left that situation that he might proclaim "the kingdom of heaven to be at hand" in the hearing of those to whom he had not, generally, had access; and then fixed on Ænon as a suitable place on account of the accommodation it furnished in respect of water. The word "Ænon," according to Mr. Horne, imports a *place of springs*. This text yields no support to the advocates of baptism by immersion, for certainly the throngs of people who attended on John's ministry would need for other purposes as well as baptism that greatest of all conveniences in a hot climate, water, if the rite of baptism were performed by sprinkling or pouring, as well as if it were administered by immersion. Greswell thinks that the rainy season had now been some time past, and that consequently the brooks were generally dried up; a fact which sufficiently accounts for the care of John to fix the scene of his present ministry in the neighbourhood of some living fountain. *And they, &c.]* The people who came to be baptized.

Verse 24. *John was not yet cast into prison]* This, however, he was a short time afterward. It thus appears that the Baptist continued his ministry some weeks after the Redeemer commenced his. "The labours and the office of John blended with those of the Messiah, and were consummated in him and by him, just as the morning twilight blends with and is finished by the rising day."—*Ripley.*

Verse 25. *There arose a question]* A dispute, a debate

26 And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.

*Between John's disciples and the Jews*] Many learned men are of opinion that this clause should read, "and a Jew," instead of "the Jews;" meaning, that there was a controversy between some of John's disciples and another Jew, for the disciples of John were also Israelites. It is probable that *this* was a person who had been baptized by the disciples of Jesus. *About purifying*] That is, in all likelihood, about baptism. The particular subject in dispute is supposed by some to have been the comparative merits of the baptism of John and that of the disciples of Jesus; by others, the nature and efficacy of baptismal purification. May it not rather have had respect to the right of Jesus to administer that ordinance, which these disciples of John may have questioned?

Verse 26. *They came unto John*] "That he might decide the question."—*Clarke*. It does not appear that the antagonist of the Baptist's followers was in company at this time. *He that was with thee*] Evidently meaning Jesus Christ. The words, "was with thee," have reference to Jesus' attendance on John to be baptized. *Beyond Jordan*] East of that river—namely, at "Bethabara." John i. 28. *The same baptizeth, and all men come to him*] The earnest manner in which this communication seems to have been made, leads to the opinion that the dispute had been rather warm, and had called forth ill feeling. The success of Jesus had, possibly, made John's disciples envious. By "all men" coming to Christ, is meant that great numbers flocked to him: so that John was, perhaps, comparatively forsaken. In commenting on the apparent



27 John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.

28 Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him.

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dissatisfaction of these men, Mr. Barnes remarks, "Many love their *sect* more than they do Christ, and would be more rejoiced that a man became a Presbyterian, a Methodist, a Baptist, than that he became a follower of Jesus—a sincere and humble Christian. This is not the spirit of the gospel. True piety teaches us to rejoice that sinners turn to Christ and become holy, whether they follow us or not."

Verse 27. *A man can receive nothing, except, &c.*] Or, as Dr. Clarke renders, "A man can receive nothing from heaven, unless it be given him." The import of this declaration seems to be, that God alone has the rightful power to call men to the ministry of his word, and that none but he can grant them success; intimating, therefore, that the success of Jesus was of this character, and should be rejoiced in: as though John had said, "I have received, not only my commission, but the power also by which I have executed it, from above. As I took it up at God's command, so I am ready to lay it down when he pleases."

Verse 28. *Ye bear me witness, &c.*] So far from participating in the jealous feelings of his friends, the Baptist here evinces a most earnest desire to lessen the high notions they entertained of his pre-eminence, and reminds them that he had on several occasions, one of which partook of the nature of a legal investigation, (John i. 19-34,) declared himself not to be the Christ, but that "He that came after him was preferred before him," both in nature and office. As the Messiah had now publicly

29 He that hath the bride is the bridegroom : but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. This my joy therefore is fulfilled.

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assumed the duties he came to execute, it was to be expected that the harbinger of his coming would be thrown into the shade.

Verse 29. *He that hath the bride is the bridegroom*] The relation in which John stood to our Lord is here illustrated by a similitude taken from the common concerns of life. It seems to have been customary with the Jews to conduct much of the preparatory matters of marriage through a second person, termed, by the Greeks, *paranymph*, here, "friend." It is supposed to have been the business of this person to select the future wife ; to be the medium of communication between the parties ; to attend them on the marriage celebration ; and afterward to act as a reconciler should any misunderstanding arise between them. There was *usually* one such person acting for each party, excepting among the Galileans, with whom it was customary, according to the authority of Mr. Townsend, to have but one *paranymph*. As our Lord was a Galilean, Mr. Townsend considers this to be one of those seemingly unimportant yet verifying and convincing coincidences which demonstrate the truth of an assertion or the authenticity of a book more effectually than more prominent facts, because they are of such a nature as an impostor would never think of introducing. The import of the comparison is, that as the "friend" is certainly an inferior person, so far as the marriage is concerned, to the bridegroom in whose behalf he had been acting, so was John inferior to Christ. The "bride" represents the church, or body of believers, and the

30 He must increase, but I *must* decrease.

31 He that cometh from above is above all : he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth : he that cometh from heaven is above all.

“bridegroom” the Lord Jesus. The connection existing between Christ and the church is often spoken of under the figure of the marriage relation, because it most beautifully and clearly illustrates the intimacy and tenderness of the union. See 2 Cor. xi. 2 ; Eph. v. 26, 27, 32 ; Rev. xxi. 2, 9 ; xxii. 17. *The bridegroom’s voice*] Possibly meaning his expressions of satisfaction with, and of affection to, the bride who had been selected for him.—*Bloomfield. My joy is fulfilled*] Is made complete ; namely, by the flocking of the people to Jesus. The original is said to express the greatest possible satisfaction.

Verse 30. *He must increase, I, decrease*] These words convey an assurance that the celebrity and influence of Jesus would increase, while John’s would diminish ; until finally the resplendent glory of the Messiah would cause his own comparatively feeble light to fade away, just as the shining of the day-star, or of the waning moon, is lost in the effulgence of the rising sun. “So they who are now, like John, burning and shining lights, must, (if not suddenly eclipsed,) like him, gradually *decrease*, while others are *increasing* about them ; as they in their turns grew up amid the decays of the former generation. Let us know how to set, as well as how to rise ; and let it comfort our declining days to trace, in those who are likely to succeed us in our work, the openings of yet greater usefulness.”—*Wesley*.

Verse 31. *He that cometh from above*] Meaning Christ. John viii. 23. *Is above all*] The words, “above all,” or, as the original is rendered by some, *over all*, denote the

32 And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth ; and no man receiveth his testimony.

33 He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true.

superiority of our blessed Lord to all created intelligences, and agree with the declaration of the apostle, that "Christ is over all, God blessed for ever." Rom. ix. 5 They may, however, have *special* reference to his superior qualifications as an instructor. See on verse 13. *He that is of the earth is earthly*] Is a mere man. John seems here to refer particularly to himself; though the remark is certainly true of all mere men. *And speaketh of the earth*] Perhaps this phrase means, comprehends and teaches only plain and simple truths, being inadequate to the task of instructing in the "deep things of God," and consequently is an imperfect teacher. At all events, it conveys the idea of inferiority. The Baptist's design in thus contrasting himself with Christ seems to have been to show, from the superiority of our Lord's nature, the perfect reasonableness and certainty of his predominant authority and influence. Thus the grace of humility, the brightest adornment of the character of the good man, is strikingly exhibited in the conduct of this greatest of prophets.

Verse 32. *What he hath seen, &c.*] Intimating Christ's perfect knowledge of divine things. See on verse 11. *That he testifieth*] Maketh known. *No man receiveth, &c.*] That is, but *few* men; for as the words, "all men," in verse 26, evidently denote *many* men, so here "no man" must be understood to mean but few.

Verse 33. *He that hath received his testimony*] 'That is, hath believed it. *Hath set to his seal that God is true*] Has, by the act of "receiving" Christ's "testimony,"

34 For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God : for God giveth not the Spirit by measure *unto him*.

35 The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand.

avowed his full belief and conviction that it is the truth of God, who will most assuredly perform all that he has promised. 2 Cor. i. 20. The expression, "set to his seal," is a metaphor taken from the custom of certifying the authenticity of deeds or contracts by affixing to them a seal : hence to seal came to signify to *vouch*, or *attest*. May not the phrase also import that by this act the believer obliges himself to obey the requirements of God, just as by signing and sealing an instrument men lay themselves under obligation to comply with the conditions therein specified ?

Verse 34. *For he whom God hath sent*] Meaning Christ. This verse seems to contain a reason why men should receive the testimony of Jesus. *Speaketh the words of God*] Declares doctrines which ought to be regarded as divine oracles, showing themselves to be such by their own native light of truth, and proved to be such by a great variety of the most extraordinary miracles.—*Benson*. *God giveth not the Spirit by measure*] Though Jesus was God as well as man, yet, as *Mediator*, the Father anointed or endued him with the influences of the Holy Ghost, and thus completely qualified him for his great work. These influences were not partial or limited ; did not inspire him on certain occasions merely, as the ancient prophets were inspired, but dwelt in him at all times in the most full and perfect manner. To "give by measure" means to give *limitedly*, *restrictedly*.

Verse 35. *The Father loveth the Son*] Eminently loves him—above all other persons or things. *Given all things*,

36 He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life : and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life ; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

&c.] That is, whatever is necessary to procure the salvation of man : so that Jesus has all authority and power as Lord of the new dispensation.

Verse 36. *He that believeth*] With a hearty, obedient faith—that faith “which is of the operation of ‘God.’” *Hath everlasting life*] Has the beginnings of that spiritual existence which will, if he continue to believe, be infallibly followed by everlasting life. Or the case may be stated thus : Through the act of faith here spoken of, the believing soul receives forgiveness of all past sins, and adoption into the family of God, and so becomes an heir of this blessing. For the meaning of the words, “everlasting life,” see note on verse 15, p. 241. *The wrath of God abideth, &c.*] The words, “wrath of God,” denote that righteous displeasure against sin which necessarily exists in the divine Being as a God of infinite and unsullied purity, and which prompts him to punish the incorrigible violater of his laws. *Abideth on him*] That is, ever continues to rest on him : (Rev. xiv. 11 :) not being removed by the atoning merit of Christ, because he has refused to avail himself of it. May this solemn declaration awaken every soul to attain and exercise that obedient faith which is the requisite condition for inheriting everlasting life !

Not long after the Baptist had borne the foregoing decided and joyful testimony to the high authority and office of Christ, (probably less than a month after that event,) his strict sense of propriety and boldness in re-proving sin led him to expose and condemn (possibly by

some private message) the shameful conduct of Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee, in having induced Herodias, the wife of his brother Herod Philip, (*not*, however, the Philip mentioned Luke iii. 1, as was erroneously supposed in several copies of "Questions on the Gospels,") to divorce herself from her husband and marry him, he at the same time, as we are informed by Josephus, agreeing to divorce his own wife, the daughter of Aretas. See Luke iii. 19. This conduct of John excited Herod to arrest him, and throw him into prison. Mark vi. 17; Luke iii. 20. It is highly probable that if he had *dared* he would have slain him at that time; but it seems that his fear, both of John and of the people, who "counted John to be a prophet," (Matt. xiv. 5,) restrained him, though doubtless urged to this extreme course by the abandoned woman whom he had made his wife.\* Mark vi. 19. The expression, "Herodias had a quarrel against him," &c.,

\* It is urged by the Rev. E. Grewell, that the marriage had not yet actually taken place, but that the parties were known to be espoused to each other, which caused them to be spoken of as though really married. "No time," says he, "is so likely for the reproof on the part of the Baptist, as when he first heard of the contract; for to denounce the crime beforehand was, if possible, to prevent its commission. His message would probably be sent by a disciple." The effect of his message was his own imprisonment. "Nevertheless," remarks the same writer in another place, "I think there is reason to believe the remonstrances of John were attended by some good effect, and delayed, for a time, the consummation of this union. It is not credible that Herod would 'hear him gladly,' and 'do many things' by his advice, while he continued to disregard him in this respect. Still less credible is it that John would ever cease to denounce the crime."

denotes that she harboured resentment and deadly hatred, which is a crime reckoned in Scripture equivalent to murder. 1 John iii. 15. The declaration that Herod "feared" John, (Mark vi. 20,) imports that he stood in awe of him and revered him. From this, as well as from his "observing" him, or having his admonitions in mind, it would appear that John's fearless and pointed reproofs had produced a good influence on the mind of Herod; but, alas! that influence seems not to have been fostered, and certainly did not lead to holy obedience in *all things*; it consequently was "as the morning cloud and early dew," and vanished before the wicked passion which he indulged for Herodias.

Josephus, the Jewish historian, makes mention of this imprisonment of John; though he represents Herod as proceeding on more public grounds than do the inspired writers. According to him, Herod incarcerated John as a dangerous subject to the state, because of his vast influence over the people, which Herod feared, or *pretended* to fear, might be perverted to base political purposes. It is possible that this might be the *public* and *ostensible* reason of John's arrest, while that assigned by the evangelist is doubtless the secret and *true* cause of Herod's procedure. Be that as it may, a very important part of the divine counsel and gracious purposes was thus fulfilled; as by the removal of John from more active life, the attention of the people was not drawn to two distinct and dissimilar objects, but solely directed to and fixed on Him who "is the only Mediator between God and man, Christ Jesus."



## LESSON XVI.

*General introduction to the commencement of Christ's more public ministry—His conversation with the woman of Samaria.—MATT. iv. 12; MARK i. 14, 15; LUKE iv. 14; JOHN iv. 1–21.*

JOHN iv. 1–21.

WHEN therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John,

2 (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,)

3 He left Judea, and departed again into Galilee.

## NOTES ON JOHN iv. 1–21.

WE have now come to that period in our Lord's history when he commenced his more public labours, especially as a preacher of the gospel. It is accordingly said of him, (Mark i. 14, 15,) "*Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe the gospel.*" With this statement of Mark, Matthew and Luke agree. Matt. iv. 12; Luke iv. 14. On his journey into Galilee the event transpired which forms the principal topic of the present lesson.

Verses 1–3. *When the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard, &c.]* By "the Lord" is meant the blessed Saviour. He was at this time in the "country parts of Judea," whither he had retired after the passover. John iii. 22. He knew, either by information or his own prescience, that the Pharisees of Jerusalem had heard of the success of his ministry in these parts, and being aware that their ill will and hostility would be excited by the intelligence, he determined to depart from Judea into Ga-

4 And he must needs go through Samaria.

5 Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph.

lilee, where he would not be as subject to their inspection, the population, were less under their influence. Beside this, John had been lately removed, apparently from among the Galileans, under very disheartening circumstances, and it may be that the condition of that people, and the interests of the work Jesus had in hand, now particularly called on him to stand in the place of his silenced harbinger. His so doing would also be a source of consolation to the Baptist, and to his disciples in that quarter.

Verse 4. *He must needs go through Samaria*] That is, if he went the most direct route into Galilee, for it ran through the heart of that province: sometimes, however, persons took the eastern route through Perea; and Jesus afterward came up that way when about to attend one of the feasts at Jerusalem. Samaria is the central province of Palestine on the west of the Jordan, being bounded by the province of Judea on the south, and that of Galilee on the north. The greater part of this rich country was anciently occupied by the tribe of Ephraim.

Verse 5. *A city called Sychar*] Anciently called Sichem or Shechem. Gen. xii. 6; xxxiii. 18, 19. It is thought by some to have been called "Sychar," which signifies *drunkenness*, in derision, on account of the supposed prevalence of this vice among its former inhabitants. See Isa. xxviii. 1, 3, 7, 8. Bloomfield suggests the change might have been a mere dialectical corruption. The city was probably originally built by Hamor or Shechem, whose name it bore; for the allusion to it in Gen. xii. 6 is generally allowed to be in anticipation, meaning merely

the place where Sichem was afterward built. This town was destroyed by Abimelech, son of Gideon, for resisting his usurpation, although it had been the first to acknowledge his supremacy. Judges ix. 45. It must, however, have been speedily rebuilt, as the psalmist notices it, Psal. lx. 6, and Rehoboam the son of Solomon convened Israel at this place for his coronation. 1 Kings xii. 1. On the destruction of the city of Samaria by Hyrcanus, about one hundred and fifty years before Christ, Shechem became the principal city of the Samaritans. The present name of the town is variously spelled Nablous, Naplouse, Napolose, and Naplosa, all from the ancient Greek *Neapolis*, meaning new town or new city. It occupies a most pleasant situation in a narrow valley between mounts Gerizim and Ebal, the former on the south and the latter on the north, which press it so closely on each side as to leave no room to add to its breadth, though it might be indefinitely extended lengthwise. It consists of two long streets, intersected by several smaller ones, mostly crossing them at right angles, and has a population of about six or eight thousand, mostly Mohammedans. It is, upon the whole, a flourishing place, considering the general misery of the country. Soap is the principal manufacture, and cotton the chief product of the fields. Its distance from Jerusalem is about thirty-four or thirty-six miles north. "There is nothing in the Holy Land," says Dr. E. Clarke, "finer than the view of Napolose from the heights around it. As the traveller descends toward it from the hills, it appears luxuriantly embosomed in the most delightful and fragrant bowers, half concealed by rich gardens and by stately trees collected into groves all around the bold and beautiful valley in which it stands." Sychar is remarkable in Biblical history as being the

place where the "father of the faithful" first settled on his entrance into Canaan, and where he first erected an altar to the God of heaven. It was in this valley, and on the sides of the adjacent mountains, that Joshua stationed the whole Israelitish host, six tribes on the one side of the ark and six on the other, while the blessings and curses of the law were read in their hearing, and "all the people said, Amen." Deut. xxvii. 11, &c.; Josh. viii. 33, 34. The spectacle must have been one of true sublimity. Here, too, the same heroic leader assembled the elders of the nation, a short time before his death, and gave them his solemn admonition to be obedient to God, and received their unqualified promise: and here the bones of the patriarch Joseph were interred. Josh. xxiv. 1, 21, 22, 32. It was at Shechem also that the ten tribes revolted from their allegiance to the son of Solomon. 1 Kings xii. 16. *Parcel of ground Jacob gave Joseph*] Namely, on his death-bed. Gen. xlviii. 21, 22. This seems to have been the only real estate the patriarch possessed, with the exception of the field and cave of Machpelah, which had been bought for a family burial-place. It was obtained by purchase from Hamor, for "a hundred pieces of silver." Gen. xxxiii. 19. On bequeathing this piece of land to his favourite son, Jacob remarked that "he took it out of the hand of the Amorite with his sword and bow," by which is probably meant that on some occasion of his absence from the spot the neighbouring Amorites had seized it, and he had been obliged to resort to force of arms ere he could regain it. This "parcel of ground" is supposed to be "the fine vale" into which the narrow valley of Nablouse enters, on the road to Jerusalem.

Verse 6. *Jacob's well was there*] The well now exhibited as the "Jacob's well" of the text is, according to

6 Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with *his* journey, sat thus on the well: *and* it was about the sixth hour.

Buckingham, called the "well of Samaria," and is said to be situated about a mile from the town, toward Jerusalem. The distance, however, forms no objection, as the town seems to have once extended further in that direction than it now does, and it is well known that the inhabitants of eastern cities are often obliged to procure water from a much greater distance than this. The well is now enclosed within an arched or vaulted building, and the only access to it is by means of a small hole in the roof of this building scarcely large enough for a moderate sized person to pass through. Of course this covering did not exist in the time of Christ. The well is described by Maundrell as being about thirty-five yards deep, and contained, when he saw it, about fifteen feet of water. Buckingham represents it as dry at the time of his visit. Judging from these statements, it can no longer be resorted to by the inhabitants of the neighbouring town for water. Nablouse seems, however, to be well supplied with this necessary article. Mr. J. D. Paxton says, "A little east of the town is a spring, the waters of which flow eastward; and close to the town on the west is a fine spring, the waters of which flow west." *Jesus, being wearied, sat thus on the well*] The word "thus," here, probably refers to Jesus' fatigued condition; being *thus wearied*, he sat down "on," or, as the word more properly denotes, *by* the well, with the intention of taking rest and refreshment. *The sixth hour*] Most commentators understand John to use the Jewish computation of time, and consequently take this "sixth hour" to be about midday. It may be objected, however, to this view, that the east-

7 There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water : Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink.

8 (For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.)

9 Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.

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ern women repair to the wells for water in the morning and evening, *not* in the heat of the day. But allowing the evangelist to have adopted the *Roman* division of time, the "sixth hour" would agree with six in the evening, (or the same hour in the morning,) and thus be in unison with this well-known custom; and consequently the coming of the "Samaritan woman" to draw water at *that* hour would be in strict accordance with ancient and universal usage. Besides, if Jesus had travelled from the "country parts of Judea" that day, as he likely had, he had probably performed a journey of no less than twenty-four or twenty-six miles, which he could not well have done by or before twelve o'clock at noon, but which was the distance ordinarily accomplished in a day's travel.

Verse 7. *There cometh a woman of Samaria, &c.*] Meaning, "a Samaritan woman." She was doubtless a resident of "Sychar." It has long been the practice in the East for women to fetch the water used in the families. Gen. xxiv. 13-15; 1 Sam. ix. 11. "Haynes, the traveller, informs us that he and his companions were generously supplied with water for their horses, furnished by women who were drawing it from the same well."—*Clarke in Harmer.*

Verse 9. *How is it that thou, a Jew, &c.*] The woman would know that Jesus was a Jew, both from his appearance and manner of speaking, as there was a wide differ-

ence between the dialect of the Samaritans and that of the Jews. She was evidently surprised at our Lord's request; and it *may be*, that her language implied a refusal to oblige him. "In Atleet, on the road from Nablous to Jerusalem," says Mr. Munroe, "passing out of a gateway we crossed a marsh, and were proceeding on our way, when some women were discovered drawing water at a well near the track, and the day being hot, I desired my servant to ask if they would give me some to drink, but they refused the indulgence, one of them exclaiming, 'Shall I give water to a Christian, and make my pitcher filthy, so that I can use it no more for ever?' This happened within the precincts of [the ancient province of] Samaria, and was a proof how little change the spirit of the people has undergone within the last eighteen centuries. These women were young and handsome, with full, dignified, and stately figures: a dark coloured fillet bound the head, and, passing under the chin, left the face entirely uncovered."—*Summer Rambles in Syria. The Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans*] That is, have no friendly interchange of kind offices; though they occasionally bought and sold of each other, as a matter of mutual convenience. That the words, "the Jews have no dealings," &c., cannot be taken in their usual acceptance of *no intercourse*, is clear from the statement contained in the preceding verse, that the disciples were gone into the Samaritan city Sychar "to buy food." The sentence, "the Jews have," &c., forms no part of the dialogue between our Lord and the woman, but is added by the evangelist, as a reason why she spoke as she did. These Samaritans were the descendants of a mixed population of heathen, who had been transferred by Shalmanezzer, king of Assyria, from some region probably beyond

the Euphrates, and the remnant of the ten tribes who had been left in the land when the bulk of their nation were carried into captivity by this Assyrian conqueror. 2 Kings xvii. 24, &c. On the return of a portion of the Jewish (*not Israelitish*) nation from the Babylonish captivity, with permission to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and to reconstruct the temple, the Samaritans desired, from motives of worldly policy, to unite with them in these acts, professing to be the worshippers of the same God, though they were in fact semi-idolaters, having incorporated the worship of Jehovah, as "God of the land," with the idolatrous service paid by their heathen progenitors to the idols of the country whence they had emigrated. Their request was, of course, denied. Compare Ezra xlv. 1-3, with 2 Kings xvii. 27-33. In revenge, the disappointed Samaritans, aided by the neighbouring Moabites and Arabians, threw many impediments in the way of rebuilding the city and temple, and succeeded by their misrepresentations in putting a stop to the progress of the work for several years. After this, Manasseh, son of the Jewish high priest, who had married the daughter of Sanballat, governor of the Samaritans, being ejected from his priesthood because of his refusal to put away his "strange wife," (Neh. xii. 28,) went to reside with his father-in-law, who erected a temple on mount Gerizim, similar to that at Jerusalem, and constituted Manasseh high priest, alleging, from a passage in the pentateuch, (Deut. xxvii. 4, 5, reading mount *Gerizim* instead of mount *Ebal*, which they contend to be the *true* reading, and Deut. xi. 29,) that it was there, and *not* at Jerusalem, that the national altar should be erected. This attempt to undermine the reputation of the ancient seat of religion, and to introduce an opposition temple and priesthood, greatly



10 Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink ; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.

exasperated the Jews. To these causes may be attributed, in a great measure, the bitter animosity which prevailed between the two nations. Among the Jews, the appellation, "a Samaritan," was a term expressive of the utmost contempt and malignity. See John viii. 48.

Verse 10. *If thou knewest the gift of God*] The word rendered "gift" is thought by some eminent commentators to denote rather the disposition from which the "gift" proceeded than the gift itself, and to have the sense of *beneficence, bounty, goodness*. If the supposition be well founded, that the language of the woman, recorded in the preceding verse, implied denial as well as astonishment, then Christ may be understood as instituting here a comparison between her conduct in being led, by national and religious prejudice, to refuse the act of kindness he had requestd of her, and the bounteous disposition of the great Creator and Father of all men. The words, "if thou knewest," mean, if thou didst rightly know, or duly appreciate, the mercy and goodness of God, so as to act according to such knowledge : for no one can be truly said to "know" the grace of God, unless his knowledge lead him to act in accordance with the divine requirements. 1 John iv. 8. *And who it is that saith, &c.*] Jesus does not here mean, had she known *his person*, for never having seen him before, she could not have known him in that sense ; but, should she perceive his *true character*. The passage, it is believed, may be understood to mean, If thou shouldest *now* know or appreciate the beneficence of God, and the true character of him who

11 The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep : from whence then hast thou that living water ?

speaketh to thee, &c. ; and was designed to awaken in the mind of the woman both desire for and expectation of receiving the blessings represented by the image of "living water." *Thou wouldest have asked, &c.*] Or, thou wouldst ask. *Living water*] This phrase usually means springing or running water, as of natural fountains, in opposition to the *dead* or motionless water of pools and cisterns. Thus we are told, Gen. xxvi. 19, that "Isaac's servants digged in the valley, and found there a well of springing (Heb. and Greek, and also the margin of our own version, *living*) water." "It is common in the Scriptures and the rabbinical writings to liken unto water that which refreshes and blesses the souls of men. And no wonder, since in the hot countries of the East pure water is the most refreshing of beverages, and is even reckoned among the *blessings* of life."—*Bloomfield*. Our Lord, therefore, uses the expression, "living water," as emblematic of the influence of the Holy Spirit, (John vii 37, 38,) because, to use the language of Dr. Clarke, "as water quenches the thirst, refreshes and invigorates the body, purifies things defiled, and renders the earth fruitful ; so it is an apt emblem of the gift of the Holy Ghost, which so satisfies the souls that receive it that they thirst no more for earthly good ; purifies from all spiritual defilement, and makes them fruitful in every good word and work." These rich blessings are to be received by faith.

Verse 11. *Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, &c.*] We are informed that it is usual for travellers in the East to provide themselves with leathern or other buckets, and a line, with which to draw water from the wells they oc-

12 Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?

casionally meet with in their route. "So Thevenot, in giving an account of what he provided for his journey from Egypt to Jerusalem, tells us he did not forget 'leathern buckets to draw water with:' and Rauwolf, speaking of the well or cistern at Bethlehem, says, 'It is a good rich cistern, deep and wide; for which reason the people that go to dip water are provided with small leathern buckets and a line; and so the merchants that go in caravans provide themselves also with these.'"—BUSH'S *Illustrations of Scripture*. Perceiving that Jesus had no such conveniences with him, the woman was at a loss to know how or whence he would obtain that "living water" of which he spake. From her reply it is evident she did not comprehend his meaning, but understood him to speak literally.

Verse 12. *Art thou greater, &c.*] The declaration of Jesus, that if asked he would "give living water,"—that is, as she supposed, water of superior quality,—seems to have appeared so unlikely a notion to the woman, as not to be seriously entertained. She therefore intimates her sense of the improbability of his so doing, by inquiring whether he considered himself superior, either in wisdom or power, to Jacob, who would not have dug the well if he could have found a better. If, however, Jesus could furnish better water, he would by so doing prove himself superior, in that thing, to the distinguished and venerated patriarch. *Our father Jacob*] The Samaritans claimed to be the children of Jacob as being the descendants of the ten tribes. Mr. Jowett, who visited Palestine in 1823-4, says of the remnant of this people then living at She-

13 Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again :

14 But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst ; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

chem, "The Samaritan priest informed us, that among their people here one family (the priest's own) were of the tribe of Levi, four or five of the tribe of Manassch, and that all the rest are of Ephraim, excepting one [person] of the tribe of Benjamin. In all, they are between twenty and thirty houses. The narrative in 2 Kings xvii. 24, &c., they reject as a fabrication." The Samaritans are, however, several times spoken of or treated by our Lord as strangers and heathen, and therefore their claim to Jewish descent can hold good only in a very remote and qualified sense. Matt. x. 5, 6 ; Luke xvii. 18.

Verses 13, 14. *Whosoever drinketh of this water*] Our Lord here shows that he does not depreciate Jacob or his well ; but intimates that however great was the benefit bestowed by the patriarch, *he* can bestow a far greater, and thus is superior to Jacob.\* *Shall thirst again*] Because it is its nature to allay thirst but for a little time. *But whosoever drinketh of, &c.*] "Will never, provided he continue to drink thereof, be miserable, dissatisfied, without refreshment. If ever that thirst returns, it will be the fault of the man, not the water."—*Wesley*. "For how can he lack water who has in himself an eternal spring?"—*Clarke*. *A well of water springing up, &c.*] "The general meaning of the words, when divested of the figure, is," says Bloomfield, "that such shall be the vivifying effect of the gospel, as to satisfy the most ardent desires of the soul ; which, placing its happiness in

15 The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw.

16 Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither.

God and his worship, no other desire will be thought of. Also, that such is the nature of that doctrine, that it purifies a man from vicious inclinations, and is, as it were, an ever-springing fountain of holy affections, producing comfort here, and everlasting happiness hereafter." We have in this discourse a beautiful exhibition of the readiness and elegance with which our blessed Lord took occasion from common topics of conversation to introduce the subject of religion, and the result proves with what happy effect it was attended. As his professed imitators, it is the duty of Christians generally to follow his example on all suitable occasions, thus availing themselves of every means to instruct, and edify, and save the souls of those with whom they have intercourse.

Verse 15. *Give me this water, that I come not, &c.*] Still most strangely understanding him to speak of natural water. This misapprehension is the more astonishing, since the Easterns were greatly in the habit of speaking figuratively, and consequently were generally ready to discover the import of an enigmatical expression. With them, too, water was a very general figure to denote either blessings or trials, according as it was used. For an instance of each, see Isa. xxxv. 6, 7; Psal. lxxix. 1. Some expositors suppose the woman to have spoken sarcastically, but there is no evidence of this.

Verse 16. *Go, call thy husband, &c.*] As the previous part of the conversation had awakened interest and desire in the heart of the woman, even though not rightly apprehended, our Lord now so changes the discourse as to

17 The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband :

18 For thou hast had five husbands ; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband : in that saidst thou truly.

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enable him to speak effectually to her heart. He therefore says, "Go, call thy husband," &c. : perceiving by his prescience the answer that would be made, he designed so to use her reply as to convince her that, although they had never before met, he knew the secrets of her life, and thus prepared her to receive him as the Messiah.

Verse 17. *I have no husband*] Meaning, probably, that though contracted or espoused to some man, she was not yet actually married to him. Some commentators think it clear from her answer that she wished to evade the subject on which Christ had touched. It *may be* that she did, but her reply does not prove this to have been the case. *Thou hast well said*] That is, thou hast *truly* said.

Verse 18. *Thou hast had five husbands*] From all of whom she may have been lawfully released, either by their death or by being divorced from them. It is well known that the marriage relation was easily dissolved, at this time, among Jews and Gentiles generally, and there is no reason to suppose that the connection was regarded as more sacred and binding among the Samaritans. *He whom thou now hast, &c.*] Thus Christ manifested his intimate knowledge of her past life. This he did through the possession of that essential attribute of the Godhead termed omniscience, or all knowledge. At first sight it might appear evident that this woman was living in adultery, as the words, "he whom thou now hast," &c., might very naturally be understood to mean, he with whom thou art living as his wife is not thy husband. By

19 The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet.

the Samaritan as well as Jewish law, however, this crime was strictly forbidden; (for both nations received the precepts of Moses as the foundation of their civil and religious codes;) and it is by no means likely that if she had been thus guilty our Lord would have passed her case without more open and severe reproof than he seems to have given; nor can it be supposed that a woman of known bad character would have been able to influence the inhabitants of Sychar in the manner she did. Verses 29, 30, 39, 42. May not a satisfactory explanation be found in the fact, that the customs of both Jews and Samaritans allow such a construction to be put on the words, "he whom thou now hast," &c., as to exculpate her from so serious a charge? Betrothment was regarded, in one sense, as marriage;—that is, persons betrothed could no more be separated than could married persons; and unfaithfulness in the one case was deemed equally criminal as in the other. Persons known to be betrothed or espoused were also commonly spoken of as if actually married. It is not, therefore, necessary to conclude she was living in this kind of sin.

Verse 19. *Thou art a prophet*] The word "prophet," in its highest sense, means one who, being divinely inspired, was enabled to declare things which must otherwise have remained unknown. It also means any person acting under supernatural influence, in which sense the apostle Paul (Titus i. 12) calls a poet a prophet, because the ancients believed their poets to be inspired. This was the woman's reason for calling Christ a prophet—she believed him to be an inspired person, because he manifested a knowledge of things connected with her history

20 Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.

of which, as a stranger, he must have been ignorant, had they not been supernaturally known. Supposing Jesus to be, therefore, a proper person to decide authoritatively on the vexed question between the Jews and Samaritans, whether God should be worshipped at mount Gerizim or at Jerusalem, she put to him the question recorded in the verse following.

Verse 20. *Our fathers*] Meaning, probably, the patriarchs. *Worshipped in this mountain*] That is, mount Gerizim, which she may have pointed out to our Lord at the time, it being in the immediate neighbourhood. See Gen. xii. 6, 7; xiii. 4; xxxiii. 18, 20. As stated in the note on verse 9, there was once a temple on this spot, which the Samaritans had erected probably near four hundred years before the event here noticed, but which was destroyed by John Hyrcanus, prince and high priest of the Jews, about one hundred and fifty years before the birth of Christ. It is not known that the temple was ever rebuilt, but an altar is said to have been constructed on the mountain, to which the people long continued to resort to offer sacrifice. Mr. Jowett says that still "three times a year they go up mount Gerizim, but we did not understand what their services were on these occasions;" though he was informed it was "*not* to sacrifice, for fear of the Turks. When they do sacrifice, it is done in some private place, and in the city, that they may not be molested." *Ye say*] Ye Jews. *In Jerusalem, &c.*] The city within which the temple was built, according to the command of God, (2 Chron. vi. 1, 6; vii. 12, 16; 1 Kings x. 3,) and to which the people were used to resort at



21 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father.

stated times for his service. This was partly done to strengthen the bond of national friendship, to keep the people separate from the surrounding heathen nations, and to secure uniformity of religious opinion and practice. By the term "worship" is meant that devout religious adoration which is due to God from all intelligent creatures, and which cannot be innocently rendered to any other being. *Exod. xxxiv. 14.*

Verse 21. *Woman, believe me]* As the woman had professed her conviction that Jesus was a "prophet," he very reasonably claims her belief of the truth he was about to utter. This manner of introducing his declaration may also be understood to mark its importance. *The hour cometh]* Meaning, the time is nigh. *When ye shall neither in this mountain, &c.]* That is, when God shall be worshipped in neither place *exclusively* or *preferably*, but when "incense and a pure offering"—the incense of sincere, believing prayer, and the offering up of devout, grateful, holy hearts,—should be presented with equal acceptance in any and every place. The Saviour certainly does not mean that acceptable worship should not be offered at the places especially named, but merely, not in those places only or preferably. *Mal. i. 11; Matt. xvi. 20; 1 Tim. ii. 8.* There is in this a reference to the abolition of the ceremonial law, and the establishment of the more spiritual dispensation of the gospel, which was brought about on the memorable day of pentecost, about three years after the date of this conversation.

Perhaps we cannot better close the notice of events contained in this lesson than by giving the following ex-

tract from Dr. E. D. Clarke, the traveller. He says, "Perhaps no Christian scholar ever read the fourth chapter of St. John without being struck with the numerous evidences of truth which crowd upon the mind in its perusal; within so small a compass it is impossible to find in other writings so many sources of reflection and of interest. Independently of its importance as a theological document, it concentrates so much information that a volume might be filled with the illustration it reflects on the history of the Jews, and on the geography of their country. The journey of our Lord from Judea into Galilee; the cause of it; his approach to the metropolis of this country; its name; his arrival at the Amorite field which terminates the narrow valley of Sichem; the ancient custom of halting at a well; the female employment of drawing water; the disciples sent into the city for food, by which its situation out of the town is obviously implied; the question of the woman referring to existing prejudices which separated between the Jews and the Samaritans; the depth of the well; the Oriental allusion contained in the expression, '*living* water;' the history of the well, and the customs thereby illustrated; the worship upon mount Gerizim;—all these occur within the space of twenty verses."

## LESSON XVII.

*Christ's conversation with the Samaritan woman concluded—Many of the Samaritans believe on him.*

JOHN iv. 22–42.

**Y**E worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews.

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## NOTES ON JOHN iv. 22–42.

Verse 22. *Ye worship ye know not what, &c.*] Rather, *Ye worship what ye know not*, thus accusing the Samaritans of *ignorant*, though not of idolatrous worship, which their ancestors practised. 2 Kings xvii. 28, 29. Some good judges of the original suggest that the passage may be rendered, “Ye worship ignorantly, we worship knowingly:” and it is inferred, that as the question which elicited this remark was as to the more proper place of religious service, Gerizim or Jerusalem, (see verses 19, 20,) our Lord is to be understood as deciding in favour of the latter city. May it not be as reasonably concluded, however, that by this observation Jesus sought to divert the woman’s attention from the *place*, to the *object* and *manner* of worship? for he had already declared that the distinction in favour of particular places should soon be done away. Verse 20. It is highly probable that the Samaritans had not so clear ideas of the character of the great Being as the Jews had, for they are charged with either totally rejecting or lightly esteeming all the sacred books excepting those of Moses. We may learn from this, that a correct perception of the nature and perfections of the Almighty has much to do with rendering him suitable and acceptable service; though the clearest idea of his essence will not, of itself, make a man his

23 But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.

24 God is a Spirit: and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.

sincere and obedient worshipper. Nothing but the influences of the Holy Ghost upon his soul can do this. *Salvation is of the Jews*] The word "salvation" is here put for "the Messiah," because he is the author of salvation. This change is frequent in the sacred writings. See *Psa. xxvii. 1*; *Luke ii. 30*; *Isa. xii. 2*.

Verse 23. *The hour cometh and now is*] Meaning, probably, that not only will that time certainly come, but that it "now is" at hand. *Worship the Father*] "Shall worship God as a father, even as a reconciled father in Christ."—*Benson*. The Almighty seems to be here termed "the Father," because of his adopting "true worshippers" as his children. *John i. 12*; *Gal. iii. 26*. *In spirit and in truth*] The words, "in spirit," probably denote in a holy and spiritual manner, in opposition to the external ceremonies of the Levitical code; and "in truth" may import the reality and sincerity of the service rendered, as being the expression of the single intention and desire of the heart. Those who thus "worship God in spirit and in truth," serve him with a sincere mind, with the simple offering of gratitude and prayer, with a desire to glorify him, and without external pomp and splendour. *Seeketh such, &c.*] Desires and approves such worshippers. So the commentators. If, then, we do thus worship God, we may know it, by the sweet sense of his approval resting on our hearts.

Verse 24. *God is a spirit*] That is, a being of an "immaterial, unconfined, and invisible nature, without parts,

25 The woman saith unto him, I know that *Messias cometh*, which is called Christ : when he is come, he will tell us all things.

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and not circumscribed by space or limits, as every thing corporeal must be." "There is no other passage in Scripture, besides this, where it is expressly declared that God is a spirit ; yet throughout the whole of the Scripture we are led to infer that he is so, and our duty to him is everywhere founded on the belief and knowledge of this attribute of his nature."—*Dr. S. Clarke. They that worship, &c.*] Two reasons are assigned by Christ why men "must worship God in spirit and in truth." 1st. Because such is his sovereign will ; 2d. Because of the spirituality of his existence. Being himself of a purely spiritual nature, and free from imperfection, he desires that those who serve him should do so in a perfect or sincere and spiritual manner. Those who adore him through the medium of any outward, visible representation, as images, do not worship in a spiritual way.

Verse 25. *I know that Messias cometh*] The Israelitish ancestors of the present race of Samaritans would doubtless transmit to their descendants the national expectation of a Messiah ; so that the woman's knowledge of this fact need not surprise us, even if it were certain that her nation had rejected the prophetic writings, wherein the coming of the Messiah is more clearly predicted than it is in the books of the law. Having the Pentateuch, the Samaritans might thus obtain a correct conception of God, so far as his character is therein revealed. *Which is called Christ*] These are the words of the evangelist, explaining to his readers that the Hebrew word "*Messias*," which the woman had used, was of the same import as the Greek word "*Christ*," with which they were more

26 Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am *he*.

27 And upon this came his disciples, and marvelled that he talked with the woman : yet no man said, What seekest thou ? or, Why talkest thou with her ?

familiar. They both signify *anointed*. *He will tell us all things*] Probably meaning, he will instruct in "all things" belonging to the proper worship of God, (see verses 20, 22,) and consequently as to *place* and *manner*. The Samaritans are said to have regarded the expected Messiah much more in the light of a religious teacher and spiritual ruler than did the mass of the Jewish nation, notwithstanding their comparatively limited means of learning the true nature of his kingdom.

Verse 26. *I—am he*] This was the first time Jesus had openly avowed his real character : nor did he speak as plainly again, even to his disciples, until a short time before his death. He, however, frequently *hinted* who he was. The reason why our Lord did not declare himself as explicitly to his own countrymen as he did on this occasion has been conjectured to be, because he wished to avoid exciting the opposition of the rulers, lest they should trammel him in his ministry ; and to do nothing to create delusive expectations in the minds of the common people, lest they should revolt against the Roman power, under the impulse of false impressions of the nature of his Messiahship. Besides, if it be true that the Samaritans entertained more correct ideas of the office of Christ than did the Jews, that fact furnishes a sufficient reason for his treating them with greater confidence.

Verse 27. *Upon this, &c.*] The disciples seem to have arrived from the city whither they had been to buy food, verse 8, directly after Jesus had declared himself to be the Messiah. Their coming appears to have put a stop

28 The woman then left her water-pot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men,

29 Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?

30 Then they went out of the city, and came unto him.

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to the conversation. *Marvelled that he talked, &c.*] Mr. Wesley, Dr. A. Clarke, and others, represent the astonishment of the disciples to be occasioned by their Lord's publicly conversing with a woman; which, say they, the custom of the times forbade. Others, however, think that the surprise was not so much owing to his conversing with a female, as to that female being a *Samaritan* woman: in which case their surprise would partake of the character of her own, when Jesus asked her to "give him drink." Verse 9. Notwithstanding their astonishment, however, none of the disciples questioned either our Lord or the woman. The phrase, "What seekest thou?" is said by Bloomfield to be equivalent to *What is your purpose or business?*

Verses 28-30. *Left her water-pot, &c.*] Or bucket. Her mind was so occupied with the thoughts which the conversation had given rise to, and which completely absorbed her attention, as to cause her to forget other things. *Went into the city*] Apparently with the design of making known what had passed. *Which told me all things that ever I did*] This Christ had not really done; but so powerfully was she impressed with the knowledge he had displayed, that it seemed to her as if her whole conduct had been exposed before him. The expression also shows the excited state of her mind, as it is usual for persons when under deep feeling to express themselves strongly, and with somewhat of exaggeration. Mr. Wesley observes, "Our Lord had told her but a few

31 In the mean while his disciples prayed him, saying, Master, eat.

things; but his words awakened her conscience, which soon told her all the rest." *Is not this the Christ?*] The woman did not use the word "Christ," but the synonymous term, *Messiah*, for she used a dialect of the Hebrew language, and "Christ" is Greek. It is urged by some learned men that the true reading of this passage is, "Is this the Christ?" Dr. A. Clarke remarks, that the Jews believed one essential characteristic of the Messiah would be, that he should be able to tell the secrets of all hearts: and that when the impostor Barchochab arose, the people finally decided against his claims to the Messiahship, and put him to death, because he could not positively determine the character of persons with whom he was unacquainted. Judging from the argument adduced by the woman, and inference drawn therefrom, it is probable that the Samaritans held the same opinion, in this respect, with the Jews. The verse following this informs us that a number of the citizens complied with her request to visit Christ.

Verse 31. *In the mean while*] That is, between the time of the woman's leaving them and the arrival of the men of Sychar. *His disciples prayed him*] Besought or entreated him, probably knowing him to be *faint* as well as "weary." *I have meat, &c.*] That which gives support and refreshment to a person is sometimes figuratively called his *food*. The Saviour wished to convey the idea that he had been enjoying refreshment of a kind of which they were not thinking. His work of teaching, and contributing to the salvation of souls, strengthened and refreshed his spirit.—*Ripley*. Thus teaching us that the mind and affections may become so absorbed in doing the



32 But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of.

33 Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him *ought* to eat?

34 Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.

35 Say not ye, There are yet four months, and *then* cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.

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will of God as to cause forgetfulness of or inattention to hunger, weariness, and pain; see Job xxxiii. 12; and that the main business of life is to do the will of God.

Verses 33, 34. *Hath any man brought, &c.*] The disciples understood our Lord to speak of natural food, which seems to have increased their astonishment. *Jesus saith, My meat, &c.*] Perceiving into what mistake the disciples had fallen, Jesus corrects their error by giving them to understand that he spake of *spiritual* refreshment. Christ's object in coming into the world was to redeem men from the love, practice, and condemnation of sin, and to restore them to the favour of God, and to the love and practice of moral purity. This he had been labouring to effect in the case of the Samaritan woman. By "doing the will of Him that sent him," &c., is meant the employment of all right means to bring men back to their allegiance to God, and to consequent happiness.

Verse 35. *Say ye not, There are yet four months, &c.* This appears to have been a proverbial saying, importing that from the close of sowing-time to the opening of the harvest was usually, in Judea, a period of four months. Says an intelligent and critical writer, "There were two seasons of harvest among the Jews; that of barley harvest, the first-fruits of which were to be consecrated at

the passover, and the wheat-harvest, the first-fruits of which were presented at the pentecost," fifty days after the gathering of the former harvest. Lev. xxiii. 5, 10, 15, 17. "Between each of these seasons and the corresponding seed-time there was literally an interval of four months." It is contended by some chronologers (among others by Lightfoot and Newcome) that our Lord speaks here of a *literal* seed-time, whence they infer that this journey must have been performed at about the beginning of our December. The compiler inclines, however, to the opinion adopted by some other equally eminent writers, that the journey was undertaken some four or five weeks after the passover, and consequently two or three weeks before the feast of pentecost, when the wheat would either be *fully* ripe or very nearly so. If this view be correct, then "the feast of the Jews," referred to John v. 1, may be set down with almost positive certainty to be that of the pentecost ensuing. The question is of interest, as going far to determine the duration of the Saviour's ministry, &c. *Look on the fields; they are white*] Alluding to the appearance presented by the fields of ripe grain, which had now exchanged their green colour for one of light yellow, and at a distance would have a whitish cast. Does not this expression strengthen the opinion that these words were uttered in the neighbourhood of harvest-time rather than of seed-time? Be that as it may, the matter has but little to do with the import of our Lord's reflections, as he doubtless spoke of a *spiritual*, not of a natural "harvest;" his object being to encourage his disciples in the work he intended to assign to them, by predicting the rapid success which should crown their ministrations.

36 And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal; that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.

Verse 36. *He that reapeth, &c.*] Our Lord here follows out the figure with which he had commenced—that of a *harvest*. The “reaper” here meant is the spiritual harvester—the minister of the gospel. *Receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit, &c.*] Meaning, that as the agricultural labourer “receiveth wages” and “gathereth fruit” as the reward of his toils, so would the faithful minister of Christ, though with this important difference, that his reward would be chiefly of a spiritual and enduring character. “Christ compares the case of a faithful Christian minister to that of a considerate reaper, who is supported in his fatigue not only by a regard to his own wages, but to the advantage which the public receives by the harvest he gathers in. This the original seems plainly to import, and so is parallel to James v. 20, ‘He which converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death,’ &c., and suggests a most forcible consideration to diligence and zeal. If the spiritual reaper save his own soul, even that is fruit abounding to his account, fruit gathered to ‘life eternal.’ And if he be instrumental in saving the souls of others too, there also is fruit gathered. This is the comfort of faithful ministers, that their work has a tendency to, and is instrumental of, the eternal salvation of precious souls.”—*Doddridge and Henry*. *He that soweth, &c.*] A “sower” is one who scatters or plants seed in the earth; a “reaper” is one who gathers the ripe grain. The labour of both is necessary to the desired end, and both should equally rejoice at the success of their efforts. In the application of this figurative language, “the sower” is he who instils divine truth into the

37 And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth.

mind, and "the reaper" is he by whose instrumentality that truth is so nurtured as to result in the conversion of the soul to God. As in the literal, so in the spiritual harvest. "both he that sows and he that reaps" are to rejoice together, being equally honoured in their work. "The teacher in the Sunday school, who sows the seed in early life," remarks Mr. Barnes, "shall rejoice with the minister of the gospel who may gather in the harvest, and both join in giving all the praise to God."

Verse 37. *Herein is that saying true*] That is, is verified, or made to appear true. *One soweth, another reapeth*] This proverb is generally quoted in proof of the unstable, changing character of earthly things. Lev. xxvi. 16; Micah vi. 15; Hos. vii. 9. But the sense in which our Lord uses it is, that one man's labours *prepare the way* for another person's efforts; as one individual may sow the seed, and another gather the harvest. It sometimes happens that one minister of Christ preaches the gospel with little *apparent* effect, while another, succeeding him, is crowned with eminent success. It by no means follows, however, that the former is not equally faithful and competent with the latter; but there was, it may be, a preparing of the people—a "breaking up of the fallow ground"—necessary to the outpouring of the Spirit, which it was the laborious and in some respects disheartening duty of the former to perform, while the delightful task of reaping the fruits of the prayers, and tears, and powerful appeals of this self-sacrificing man of God devolved on the latter. Yet they should be held in equal estimation, and both honoured for their work's sake.

38 I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours.

39 And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did.

40 So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days.

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Verse 38. *I sent you to reap, &c.*] Meaning, “*I do send you to reap,*” &c.; “for our Lord is speaking prophetically, and in the usual style of the language of prophecy, he speaks of what was still future as though it were already past.” These disciples were about to “enter” into the work of turning men to God; a work in which they proved remarkably successful, the way having been before prepared by the writings of Moses and the prophets, the ministry of the Baptist, the personal labours and sufferings of Jesus, and the providential dispensations of God. The expressions, “bestowed no labour,” must be understood restrictedly, implying comparatively but little labour in proportion to the great moral harvest they should gather. “Entered into,” &c., means sent to gather in the fruits of the labours of their predecessors.

Verse 39. *Many of the—city*] Of the city of Sychar. *Believed on him*] Believed him to be, what he had been represented, the Messiah. Verse 42. *For the saying, &c.*] “A word fitly spoken, how good it is!” By the sincere and earnest exhortation of this woman, these “many” precious souls were convinced of the Messiahship of Jesus, and probably saved from perdition. Here is a notable example of the salutary results of *personal effort*. If every Christian believer were as faithful in spreading the knowledge of Christ as was this woman, how soon would

41 And many more believed because of his own word ,

42 And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying ; for we have heard *him* ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.

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“the glory of God cover the earth !” We may also learn from this case, that the Lord sometimes uses very weak instruments to bring about his gracious purposes ; thus saving man from the danger of self-confidence, and securing to himself the glory. See 1 Cor. i. 28, 29 ; 2 Cor. iv. 7.

Verses 41, 42. *His own word*] Because of the doctrine which he taught them during the two days he remained with them. These words seem not to make a part of the conversation at the well, but to have been spoken at or after the departure of our Lord from Sychar. *We believe, not because of thy word*] That is, “not because of thy word *merely*,” for the credence these Samaritans had given to the testimony of the woman was strengthened and confirmed by the teaching of Christ. *Saviour of the world*] Not of the Jews only, but of the whole human race. Whether they learned this truth from Christ himself, or had inferred it from the Old Testament Scriptures which they possessed, is not stated.

LESSON XVIII. [*Date*, A. D. 27.]

*Jesus leaves Sychar and returns to Galilee—He miraculously restores a nobleman's son to health.*

JOHN iv. 43-54.

NOW, after two days he departed thence, and went into Galilee :

44 For Jesus himself testified, that a prophet hath no honour in his own country.

45 Then, when he was come into Galilee, the Galileans

## NOTES ON JOHN iv. 43-54.

Verses 43, 44. *After two days*] After the two days mentioned verse 40. This was, probably, about the middle of Zif, [May,] and consequently sixteen days before the feast of pentecost. *Went into Galilee*] Which province lay north of, and adjoining to, that of Samaria. *A prophet hath no honour, &c.*] This proverb our Lord quoted, apparently, on more than one occasion. See Mark vi. 4; Luke iv. 24; Matt. xiii. 57. Its meaning seems to be, that a religious teacher is, as a general thing, less credited as God's ambassador by his neighbours and friends than by strangers; and the truth of the saying is abundantly verified in Christ's experience, as it has since been in that of many other "prophets." The Saviour appears to have had the people of Nazareth in view when he thus "testified;" and it was, in all likelihood, the knowledge of their feelings toward him that determined him to pass by their city for the present, perhaps desiring that the additional evidence which the transactions at Cana would afford of his divine character might have some influence in inducing the Nazarenes to believe on him.

Verse 45. *The Galileans received him*] That is, such

received him, having seen all the things that he did at Jerusalem at the feast : for they also went unto the feast.

46 So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum.

47 When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judea into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down and heal his son : for he was at the point of death.

48 Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.

of the Galileans whose towns he entered. "Received," here, means received him in his character of a prophet—believed him to be one. The reason of their thus regarding him is given—they had heard the discourses he delivered, and had seen the wondrous works which he performed, when at Jerusalem at the late feast of the passover. See chap. ii. 23.

Verses 46, 47. *Cana.*] See note on John ii. 1, p. 211. *A certain nobleman, &c.*] Probably a minister of Herod the tetrarch—a courtier. On hearing that Christ had returned from Judea, and was then at Cana, he repaired thither, to solicit him to cure his sick son, whom he left at Capernaum, which city is therefore thought to have been his usual place of residence. By the request that Jesus would "*come and heal*" his child, it would seem that he laboured under the error of supposing that Christ could not perform the cure unless he was there in his bodily presence. Cana is supposed to have been about twenty-five miles from Capernaum.

Verse 48. *Except ye see, &c.*] Some commentators construe this expression of our Lord into a reproof of the nobleman for limiting his power as above stated. Others think that Jesus uttered the saying to rebuke the prevail-



49 The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die.

50 Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way ; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way.

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ing infidelity of the people, who would not believe on him except they saw him work "signs and wonders" almost innumerable. The Galileans "received him" because they had "seen all the things that he did at Jerusalem ;" and the petitioner himself appears to have been influenced to make his application solely by the report of those miraculous acts, which report he seems to have partly credited. He was not, therefore, entirely destitute of faith, though his reliance was not complete. Discerning the spirit of the man, as well as that of the people at large, our Lord used these words as expressive of his sorrow at their "slowness of heart to believe."

Verse 49. *Sir, come down, &c.*] "Where the heart is deeply interested, words are few, but O, how forcible !" Without replying to, or in any wise noticing our Lord's remark, the anxious and affectionate father repeats his urgent request, still supposing that, in order to the cure, Jesus must himself be present. The words, "come down," &c., are in strict keeping with the topography of the country—the road from Cana to the supposed site of Capernaum being a continued descent.

Verse 50. *Jesus said, Go thy way*] Equivalent to saying, Return to thy home without me. The reason why our Lord refused to accompany the man doubtless was, that he might convince him and others that he could as effectually perform a miracle on an absent as on a present object. *Thy son liveth*] Probably meaning, is convalescent—is in the way of recovery. *The man believed*]

51 And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told *him*, saying, Thy son liveth.

52 Then inquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.

53 So the father knew that *it was* at the same hour in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth ; and himself believed, and his whole house.

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Accredited the saying of Christ, that the child should be restored. This is an instance of the power of Jesus to convince the mind, to sooth doubts, to confirm faith, and to meet our desires.

Verses 51-53. *As he was going down*] On his return to Capernaum. *At the seventh hour*] About what we should term one o'clock, if Jewish computation be used ; about seven o'clock, morning or evening, if the reckoning be that of the Romans. Be this as it may, it appears from the fifty-third verse, that "the nobleman" knew it to be the exact time at which Jesus pronounced the cure. This conviction settled not only the anxious father, but "all his house," or *family*, in the faith of Christ, for the evangelist declares "that himself believed, and his whole house." True, Christ did not accomplish the work just in the *manner* he had been desired ; but his departure from the prescribed mode was for the greater benefit of his suppliant. This should teach implicit confidence in the divine wisdom and goodness, and induce men to refer all their wishes to the will of God. The incident also shows that affliction often results in good. Here the sickness of the son led to the faith of all the family. "Let us learn," says Dr. Clarke, "never to murmur against God, or think that he does not act kindly toward us. By providential occurrences apparently the most adverse, he may be securing our eternal salvation."

54 This *is* again the second miracle *that* Jesus did, when he was come out of Judea into Galilee.

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## LESSON XIX.

*Christ preaches in the synagogue at Nazareth—His danger, and miraculous deliverance.*

LUKE iv. 16-32.

AND he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath-day, and stood up for to read.

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Verse 54. *This is again the second miracle, &c.*] The passage would be more clearly rendered, says Campbell, "This second miracle Jesus performed after," &c.; implying that it was the second of our Lord's miracles in that country; the first being understood to be the changing water into wine, at the marriage noticed John ii. 1, &c. From the reading of the text in the common version it might be concluded that both miracles were performed after this return to Galilee, which would be a mistake.

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## NOTES ON LUKE iv. 16-32.

Verse 16. *He came to Nazareth*] This village is about fifty miles north of Jerusalem. For a notice of it see on Luke i. 26, pp. 57, 58. *As his custom was, he went into the synagogue*] From this it appears that our Lord regularly attended the usual public religious services of his country; thus giving the weight of his own example, as well as of his public teaching, to this important branch of practical religion. Suitable attention to the public worship of God is of the first importance to the well-being of society, as it lies at the root of all public and private

virtue. It is consequently the duty of every man to uphold it, both by his example and influence. The "synagogues" were buildings specially erected by the Jews for the worship of God according to the ceremonies in use among them. These consisted of singing, reading and exposition of the Scriptures, prayer, and a collection for the poor. Sacrifices could not be offered in them, this being a privilege peculiar to the national altar. Their origin is not very well known, though it is generally supposed that they came into vogue shortly after the return from the Babylonish captivity. At the time of our Saviour they were quite common, not only in Palestine, but also in such foreign cities as contained many Israelites.

It does not appear that the synagogues had any peculiar form. Each of them had an altar, or rather table, opposite the entrance, on which the sacred books were laid when in use; and on one side there was an ark or chest in which they were kept at other times. The people sat with their faces toward this part of the building, the elders usually facing them. The seats of the latter, being placed nearer the ark than were those of the congregation, were accounted the more holy; and hence they are in the New Testament termed "the chief seats." The women were separated from the men, and screened from their observation by a wooden lattice.

There were certain officers in every synagogue, whose business it was to manage its affairs, as well as to see that all the duties of religion were decently performed therein, and a proper discipline maintained. The chief of these were—

The *synagogos*, or ruler of the synagogue. Luke xiii. 14. It appears from Acts xiii. 15, compared with Mark v. 22, that there were sometimes several "rulers," though one

17 And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias : and when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,

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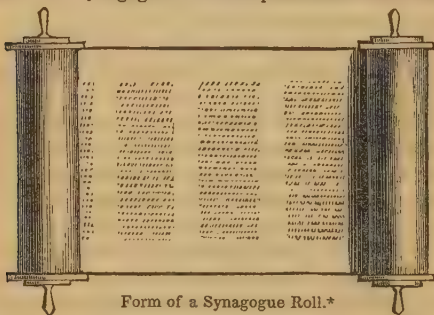
was probably chief, and the others his assistants. John calls these subordinate rulers, *elders*. Next in rank to the ruler was an officer called *sheliach zibbor*, or the angel of the church, whose province it was to offer up public prayers to God for the whole congregation.

The *chazan* appears to have been a different officer from the last, and inferior to him in dignity. He seems to have been the person who in the twentieth verse is termed the "minister," and who had charge of the sacred books : he was, probably, a subordinate, equivalent to our sexton.

*Stood up for to read*] Boothroyd and some other eminent expositors suppose that Jesus rose of his own accord, as expressive of his desire to read, and that the ruler, noticing this, selected him for the purpose. It is said that any Israelite might, by permission of the presiding officer, deliver his sentiments on any passage, and exhort his brethren, but that no one was allowed to read the sacred writings unless he were a member of the particular synagogue in which he was at that time worshipping. This custom may account for the fact that we no more hear of our Lord's reading in any synagogue, though frequent mention is made of his *preaching*. See, in corroboration, Acts xiii. 15.

Verse 17. *There was delivered, &c.*] This would be done, at the bidding of the ruler, by the *chazan* or "minister." It was usual for the person who performed the reading to place upon his head, as is done at the present day, a covering called *tallith*, or *veil* ; to which custom

St. Paul is supposed to allude, 2 Cor. iii. 15, and which covering he seems to consider emblematic of the spiritual darkness in which the great body of the Jews then were. The books of the ancients were usually written on parchment or vellum, [skins of beasts, dressed,] and, when large, on a number of such skins, sewed together, and rolled on two rollers, beginning at each end and meeting in the centre : hence the origin of the name *volume*, as applied to a book, meaning “a thing rolled up.” Of this kind are the copies of the Old Testament now used in the Jewish synagogues. These parchments were usually



Form of a Synagogue Roll.\*

written but on the inner side ; though sometimes they were “written within and without.” Ezek. ii. 9, 10. As the Hebrew is read from right to left, instead of from left to right, the reader would roll off with his left hand and on with his right. From the “book” or prophecy of Isaiah it would appear that each book, or at least each of

\* The above cut is copied from Horne’s Introduction ; the editor of which work says, it is taken from an original and very valuable manuscript in the British Museum.

18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath the larger volumes, formed a distinct roll, and had its separate place in the ark. *When he had opened the book* More literally, "*unrolled the book.*" *He found the place, &c.*] For a great number of years the Jews have had certain parts of their sacred writings divided into sections of a convenient length to be read in public worship, thus forming lessons for each sabbath day. These were so arranged that the *entire* Pentateuch, and selected portions of the prophetical writings, were read once a year. It is supposed by some Biblical critics that the passage which our Lord read on this occasion was the regular lesson, while others contend that the expression, "he found," &c., intimates that it was *not* the portion assigned to be read on that day. Dr. Jahn is of opinion that the tabular arrangement is not so old as the time of Christ, and thinks that at that period every reader selected whatever portion of the book handed him he thought proper. This seems more likely than that our Lord should depart from the prescribed lesson, if any particular method were observed. The portion selected by Jesus is chiefly recorded Isa. lxi. 1, 2, though certain expressions may be taken from other parts of the same book, in the way of illustrating, or filling out, the subject he had in hand; a freedom which Jewish usages are said to have sanctioned.—*Townsend*. The passage seems to have been chosen with the design of showing the people its fulfilment in himself; as also with allusion to the *reason* why he was called Christ, and his religion termed the gospel. We have thus his own authority for the application of the prophecy to him; as well as the decision of the Jewish expositors, who have uniformly interpreted it of the Messiah.

sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

19 To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

Verses 18, 19. *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, &c.*] By the "Spirit of the Lord," here, is meant the Holy Ghost, whose influences were communicated to and rested on our blessed Saviour in unmeasured fulness. *He hath anointed me*] Among the ancient Jews, the most distinguished persons of the state—kings, prophets, and high priests—were frequently (the latter uniformly) *inaugurated*, or introduced into their respective offices, by being "anointed," that is, having a small quantity of prepared oil poured upon their heads. See Exod. xxix. 7; 1 Kings xix. 16. Hence such persons are frequently termed "the Lord's anointed," &c. 1 Sam. xvi. 6; Psa. lxxxiv. 9; Isa. xlv. 1. It is in allusion to this custom of anointing persons of high official station that our Lord is called in Hebrew the "Messiah," and in Greek, the "Christ," the import of which titles is equivalent to the English word *anointed*. Not, indeed, that unction was ever thus poured on him, for it never was; he is called so metaphorically, as being appointed king, prophet, and priest unto God's people. *To preach the gospel to the poor*] This passage, if compared with Isa. lxi. 1, will be found not to be a literal quotation, though the same in substance. The "poor" here contemplated are not merely "the poor" in the sense of destitution of worldly property, but chiefly "the poor in spirit"—the lowly and humble in mind, whom on another occasion Christ pronounced "happy." Not, indeed, that "the poor," in the common acceptation of the phrase, are excluded from the blessings of the gospel, for the Christian revelation is



emphatically "glad tidings to the" *poor*, opening to them, without respect of persons, the same glorious hopes as to the most exalted. Still, even these must become "poor in spirit" before they can obtain the true riches. In our version of Isa. lxi. 1, which was translated from the Hebrew, the corresponding word to that here rendered "poor" is *meek*. The reason of this difference is, Luke followed the Septuagint, or Greek version of Isaiah, which reads "poor." The words, however, come from the same root, and express nearly similar traits of character. *To heal the broken-hearted*] By the "broken-hearted" are probably meant both contrite or penitent persons, and afflicted or sorrowful ones. These Jesus came to "heal;" which healing he effects in all who truly seek him by imparting to them forgiveness of sin, the comforting influences of his Spirit, and the supports of his grace: thus causing those very sorrows which had "broken their heart," to become so many channels for the communication of his love.

"Earth hath no sorrow that Heaven cannot heal."

*Preach deliverance to the captives*] "Captives" are persons deprived of their personal liberty—prisoners. To "preach deliverance" to such, is to proclaim freedom to them—to announce to them that they are, or may be, freed, namely, from the thralldom of sin—the most debasing, oppressive bondage to which man can be subjected. There is no power in existence that can accomplish this deliverance save that of the holy, blessed Spirit of God, whose energies are usually communicated through the gospel, which is thus made "the power of God." *Recovering of sight to the blind*] The parallel passage in Isa. lxi. 1 is, "the opening of the prison to them that are

bound," which is a virtual repetition of the preceding clause. It would seem that the persons who translated the Hebrew Bible into the Greek language, and whose rendering Luke here adopts, regarded the repetition of the passage as adding strength and fulness to the sense, and therefore as indicative of the severest horrors of captivity. As such, they probably conceived it to import either the actual *putting out* of the eyes of the unhappy prisoners, (a cruelty which the Easterns frequently practised on their prisoners,—witness the treatment of Samson by the Philistines, and of Zedekiah by the Chaldeans, Judg. xvi. 21 ; 2 Kings xxv. 7,) or the immuring of them in dark dungeons ; in which case they might figuratively be said to be "blind," their organs of vision being rendered useless to them through the absence of light. Now allowing the latter interpretation, the deliverance of captives from such a state of darkness, and the bringing them into the light, might very suitably be termed a "recovery of sight to the blind." These striking figures are *chiefly* used for the purpose of pointing out the darkening and enslaving effects of sin, and the spiritual illumination and freedom conferred by Christ on all those who unfeignedly believe and diligently obey the gospel. *To set at liberty them that are bruised*] This is another graphic illustration drawn from the condition of captives galled and wounded by the chafing of their chains. As this clause is not found either in the Hebrew or Greek of Isaiah lxi., it is supposed to be quoted from the sixth verse of the fifty-eighth chapter of that book, where the Greek has the same words. "It was no doubt inserted, in reading, from that passage, as illustrative."—*Bloomfield*. *To preach the acceptable year of the Lord*] The word "acceptable" means *favourable, agreeable, &c.* :—as applied to God, then, an "ac-

20 And he closed the book, and he gave *it* again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.

ceptable year" would be a season wherein he would show himself peculiarly gracious and benign, and this he does in the gospel dispensation; for it is peculiarly by means of this system of grace that he is "reconciling men unto himself." 2 Cor. vi. 2. It is supposed that our Lord has some reference, in this passage, to the ancient jubilee, which occurred every fiftieth year. At this time all debts were cancelled, forfeited inheritances were restored, and their freedom was given to Hebrew bond-servants. See Lev. xxv. 8-16. "This interesting political institution," remarks Mr. Watson, "equally marked by wisdom and benevolence, and which, when once proclaimed by sound of trumpet, filled the whole land with joy and gladness, and was, to those especially who were to partake its benefits, an *acceptable* and most *grateful* time, was the type of the gospel age of deliverance and restoration, and was so used by the prophet and quoted by our Lord. Our Lord began the proclamation of this spiritual jubilee; and it is the delightful work of his servants still to publish it, and to offer the benefits of the day—the remission of the debt of sin, the restoration of the alienated inheritance of heaven, and spiritual freedom—to all who will accept them."

Verse 20. *He closed the book*] Rolled up the volume. *The minister*] The subordinate officer who had charge of the sacred books. *Sat down*] It was customary with the Jews to *sit* while explaining the Scriptures or preaching. Chap. ii. 46; Matt. v. 1. Our Lord adopted the prevailing usage. *Fastened on him*] Were intently fixed on him; the audience gave strict attention, perceiving that

21 And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.

22 And all bare him witness, and wondered at the grace he was about to address them. It is not unlikely that the reports which were in circulation respecting his astonishing works induced the people to give this marked attention to his teaching.

Verse 21. *He began to say, &c.*] That is, he introduced his address with the following language. *This day is this scripture, &c.*] Bloomfield suggests that this sentence should read, "This day is this scripture *now in your ears* fulfilled." Our Lord evidently refers to the predictions he had just read, which were now receiving their fulfilment, inasmuch as "the Spirit of the Lord" was indeed "upon him," consecrating him to the work and office therein specified. It appears all but certain that Jesus spoke at considerable length, elucidating and applying the prophet's language in such a manner as to excite the admiration and astonishment of his hearers.

Verse 22. *All bare him witness*] To "bear witness" to any person is to testify in his favour. The import of the original in this passage probably is, that the people *applauded, extolled, or spoke well of*, Christ's performance, both as to matter and manner. *Wondered at the gracious words, &c.*] The epithet "gracious," here, is supposed to characterize the discourse as one full of benevolent sentiments. Dr. Clarke renders the passage, "Words or doctrines of grace." It may be presumed that our Lord gave a clear exposition of the affecting scriptures he had read; opening to the astonished view of his auditors the doctrine of redemption through the incarnate Saviour, and exhibiting the love of God in imparting this "last, best gift to man," in so glowing a manner as to disarm even

cious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?

23 And he said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me *their* prejudices for the time, and constrain them to "wonder at his gracious words." Mr. Wesley, remarking on the qualities which characterized our Lord's preaching, observes: "A person of spiritual discernment may find in all the discourses of our Lord a peculiar sweetness, gravity, and becomingness, such as is not to be found in the same degree even in those of the apostles." *They said, Is not this Joseph's son?*] This recollection seems to have followed their involuntary approval, and to have been called up by their reviving prejudice as an objection to our Lord's being the Messiah. The Anointed of their nation was expected to make his appearance in all "the pride, and pomp, and circumstance" of an earthly conqueror,—but Jesus was of humble parentage, and was so far removed from the trappings of worldly greatness, that "he had not where to lay his head." It was an opinion extensively prevalent among the Jews, that "when Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence he is," (John vii. 27,) but the Nazarenes could say, "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? and his sisters, *Are they not all with us?*" Matt. xiii. 55. And this want of conformity to their preconceived and mistaken notions caused them to be so "offended" or *stumbled* at his claims as to reject them. Notwithstanding the impression made by his discourse, his being (as they supposed) "the son of Joseph" was, in their estimation, death to his claims as the Messiah. "It is," says Mr. Watson, "with reference to this state of their minds, that the following words of our Lord are to be interpreted."

this proverb, Physician, heal thyself : whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country.

24 And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country.

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Verse 23. *Physician, heal thyself, &c.*] Our Lord frequently anticipated the objections of his enemies, and refuted them while they were yet working in their minds. So in the present instance. He knew that his townsmen would reject him, and that partly on the plea of his not affording them the amount of evidence necessary to induce conviction—that they would ask for proofs of his mighty power beyond what he ought consistently to give. The import of the proverb in the present case seems to be, that as a physician who should pretend that he could cure a person labouring under any disease, while he himself was suffering from the same cause, might very reasonably be required to “heal *himself*” as evidence of his capability successfully to treat another, so Jesus, who, as they had heard, had performed miracles abroad confirmatory of his claims to be the Messiah, might with equal reason be required to perform similar works *in his own city* in attestation of the truth of his pretensions. Such seems to be the reasoning ascribed by our Lord to the Nazarenes. *Whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, &c.*] Referring either to the cure of the nobleman’s son, mentioned John iv. 46, &c., or to some miracle which the evangelists may not have recorded.

Verse 24. *No prophet is accepted, &c.*] A saying so often confirmed by experience as almost to amount to an axiom. The reason may be, that those with whom we have been familiar from early life are not regarded by us, in their official character, with so much reverence as a

stranger would be who should sustain the same office : or, as public teachers, they are to some objects of envy, from their real or supposed superiority ; and to others, of dislike, from the faithfulness of their reproofs. Our Lord more than intimates, in this passage, a refusal to comply with the wish of his townsfolk to work miracles in their presence, knowing that the wish did not proceed from a sincere desire to believe and obey the truth, but was the offspring of a base passion. His conduct on this occasion was every way worthy of his exalted claims, and is a striking instance of that principle of the divine government, which, while it yields to the sincere inquirer all the evidence that is *necessary* to the establishment of his faith, denies to man more proofs in support of any truth than are sufficient to satisfy an unbiased mind. Jesus had resided at Nazareth nearly thirty years, during the whole of which time the people of that place had known him to be “ pure, holy, undefiled, and separate from sinners.” His life was in all respects irreproachable. At the end of that time he commenced his work with supernatural evidences that his mission was of God. He performed miracles, to demonstrate this truth, in places where he was less known than at Nazareth, and between which and that city there must have been constant communication, so that the news of his doings would spread rapidly and truly. His townsmen heard of these miracles, and he now came among *them*, claiming to be the Messiah, and requiring them to receive him as such : referring them for proof of the truth of his title to the testimony of their inspired writings, to their own knowledge of his holy life, and to the report of his mighty works. The evidence in his favour was thus full and complete, and their rejection of him is without excuse.—*Townsend.*

25 But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut-up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land ;

26 But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto

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Verses 25, 26. *Of a truth*] Truly, beyond all doubt. The incidents thus introduced seem to be brought forward by Christ, both in illustration of the fact that though "a prophet is not accepted in his own country," or by his own countrymen, he will be by others, and in justification of his performing miracles in favour of those who were more ready to acknowledge his authority than were the Nazarenes. *Many widows were in Israel, &c.*] The history here referred to is narrated 1 Kings xvii. 1, 8-16, which see. "Elias" means Elijah. *Three years and six months*] That is, from rain to rain ; though from 1 Kings xviii. 1, 45, it might be inferred that rain fell in the third year. There is, however, no difficulty in reconciling the statement there made with the assertions of our Lord and of St. James, who both assign the period of "three years and six months" as 'the time during which no rain fell. James v. 17. In Judea the rains occur periodically—say in the months of October and April, being once in six months. Assuming the prophet's announcement to have been made just before one of these rainy seasons, when there had already been nearly six months of dry weather, and that rain was withheld for full three years from that time, there would, in popular language, be three years and six months during which "the heavens were shut up"—that is, during which no rain fell. *Save unto Sarepta*] "Sarepta" is the Greek form of the Hebrew word "Zarephath." The place to which this name is given, is, according to the Pictorial Bible, situated



Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman *that was* a widow.

27 And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet ; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.

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about nine miles south of Sidon, and about half a mile from the Mediterranean Sea. It was formerly a town of some note, but is now reduced to an inconsiderable hamlet called "Sarphan" or "Zarfu." The words "save to," in this verse, do not express the meaning of the original, as they seem to imply that Sarepta was a Jewish city, whereas it belonged to Gentiles. Elijah was not therefore indebted to one of his own nation for support during that fearful famine, but to a poor heathen widow, whose heart the Lord opened to share with him the last morsel left to herself and her famishing child.

Verse 27. *Many lepers were in Israel, &c.*] "Lepers" are persons afflicted with the leprosy, a most loathsome disorder occasionally met with in Palestine, as well as in other hot climates, and which was deemed incurable, at least in its more malignant forms, by aught less than divine agency. For a notice of it, see on Luke v. 12, p. 335. *In the time of Eliseus*] "Eliseus" signifies Elisha, being the Greek method of spelling that name. "In the time of" means, while he exercised the prophetic office. *None cleansed saving Naaman*] "Saving" has here the sense of *but*. The import of the passage is, that no one of the "many lepers" then "in Israel" was "cleansed," or cured, of his leprosy : but Naaman the Syrian—a heathen—he *was healed*. The conduct of the Jewish maiden, through whose recommendation the Syrian general was induced to repair to Palestine, is worthy of all praise ; and the success which attended her effort is a

28 And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath,

29 And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led

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cheering instance of the beneficial results of sincere and well-directed endeavours to do good. Read and imitate. The history of Naaman's cure is recorded in 2 Kings v. 9-14, which see.

Verse 28. *They were filled with wrath*] That is, they were very angry : probably, because they understood Jesus to intimate, 1st. That they were unworthy of such displays of power and mercy as the inhabitants of Capernaum had been blessed with ; and, 2d. Because our Lord's words implied that as the prophets Elijah and Elisha had, in the instances cited, conferred important favours on Gentiles, while Jews were apparently overlooked, so he would bestow benefits on that strange people, while the children of Abraham would remain unblessed. Now as the Jews considered themselves the especial favourites of Heaven, (Matt. iii. 9,) they could ill brook the thought that the despised Gentiles should be placed on an equality with themselves, and less that they should become possessed of privileges superior to their own. Hence their anger was excited. As, however, our Lord's *personal* ministry was almost exclusively given to his countrymen, he must here have reference rather to the remote than the immediate spread of his doctrines.

Verse 29. *Thrust him out*] Apparently breaking up the meeting in a disorderly manner. *Led him unto the brow of the hill, &c.*] Nazareth is built on the lower half of the slope of a rather steep hill, and is, according to Prof. Robinson, rather more than three quarters of a mile in length and something less than half a mile wide. From the

him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong.

30 But he, passing through the midst of them, went his way,

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same authority we learn that the present population is about three thousand persons. Dr. Richardson remarks of it, "The vale resembles a circular basin, encompassed by mountains : it seems as if fifteen of them met to form an enclosure for this delightful spot. It abounds in fig trees, small gardens, and hedges of the prickly pear, and the dense, rich grass affords abundant pasture." See further on Luke i. 26, page 57. Tradition points out a precipitous hill nearly two miles south of the present town as the place to which the enraged Nazarenes hurried the Saviour, in order to "cast him down headlong;" and many eminent travellers, among whom are Maundrell and Jowett, avow their belief that the tradition is in this case a faithful witness. This hill is about fifty feet in height, and is called the Mount of Precipitation. Other travellers, however, discard this opinion, and contend for a location nearer Nazareth, though without fixing on any specific spot. This event is supposed by Greswell to have taken place on the first sabbath after our Lord's return into Galilee, agreeing with the 22d of May of that year. Probability strongly favours such a date; for as the feast of Pentecost commenced on the thirtieth of the same month, and as the male population were now evidently at home, it is plausibly urged that they had not yet set out for the feast.

Verses 30-32. *He, passing through, &c.*] Not, perhaps, by making himself invisible, but by a miraculous restraint which he suddenly laid upon them, similar to that with which he afterward, for a moment, affected the per-

31 And came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the sabbath-days.

32 And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power.

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sons who came to arrest him in the garden of Gethsemane, when "they went backward and fell to the ground." John xiii. 6. He thus showed the populace their weakness and his own power. *Came down to Capernaum, &c.*] Which he seems to have made his principal place of abode ever after, probably because of the disaffection of the Nazarenes. This must have been within a few days of the riot. *They*] The inhabitants of Capernaum. *Were astonished at his doctrine, &c.*] "Doctrine" here means his teaching in general. The people were surprised alike at the purity and point of his instructions, and the effect which they produced. Doubtless emanations of his exalted character and mission at times broke forth, and impressed his hearers with the conviction that he who addressed them was clothed with the "power" or authority of the Most High God. It is highly probable that the evangelist here remarks on the effect of Christ's preaching in anticipation, as he did not, perhaps, preach in the synagogue of Capernaum until after the call of the disciples noticed in the following lesson. Mark i. 22.

## LESSON XX. [Date, A. D. 27.]

*Peter and Andrew, James and John, called to be disciples—The miraculous draught of fishes—Christ teaches in the synagogue at Capernaum, and heals a demoniac.—*  
 MATT. iv. 18-22; MARK i. 16-28; LUKE v. 1-11.

## MARK i. 16-20.

NOW, as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.

## NOTES ON MARK i. 16-20.

Verse 16. *As he]* Jesus. *Walked by the sea of Galilee]* The Jews frequently gave the appellation "sea" to even comparatively small bodies of water: thus the "waters of Merom" are sometimes spoken of as "the sea of Cobebo;" and in accordance with this custom the evangelists Matthew, Mark, and John, being native Jews, invariably call the lake of Tiberias "a sea;" but Luke, who was a native of Asia Minor, and whose geographical terms are always more distinctive, calls it "a lake." The sea of Galilee or of Tiberias, or lake of Gennesaret, for it is spoken of in the gospels by all these names, (Matt. iv. 18; John xxi. 1; Luke v. 1,) is a beautiful sheet of water, about twelve miles long, and six broad in the widest part. It lies on the eastern shore of the province of Galilee, whence one of its titles is taken; its other appellations are derived from the city of Tiberias and the district of Gennesareth, both lying on its western border. The waters of the lake are soft, cool, exceedingly clear, and very pleasant to the taste; and abound with excellent fish, though of no great variety. Mr. Hardy compares its form to the figure of a bird when flying. The passage of the Jordan through the middle of the lake is distinctly

marked by the smooth state of the water's surface in that part.

Dr. E. D. Clarke, describing the lake as it appeared from a very favourable point of view, (the top of the so-called mount of Beatitudes,) declares it to be "almost equal, in the grandeur of its appearance, to the lake of Geneva." "Its eastern shores," says he, "exhibit a sublime scene of mountains toward the north and south, and they *seem* to close in at either extremity. To the north appeared many snowy summits towering beyond a series of intervening mountains. We considered them the summits of Libanus, but the Arabs called the principal eminence Jebel-el-Shieh.\*

From lower points of view, much of this grandeur and beauty are lost, though the scene is still imposing, especially from the northern extremity of the lake. On the east rise the mountains, not precipitously, but rolling back from the shore, green and verdant after the rain, but destitute of trees. On the west, hill rises above hill, in beautiful succession, and the loftiest visible summit is

\* "Jebel-Esssheikh, or Mount Hermon. The lower points of view, from which most travellers describe the lake, do not take in this magnificent back-ground; hence, perhaps, the comparative tameness of their descriptions. Stephens rather sneers at the comparison to the lake of Geneva, particularly on the score of the *absence* of a Mont Blanc whereas, in fact, the very presence of Mount Hermon in the distance, capped with snow, probably first suggested the comparison to Dr. Clarke. Clarke was right in describing impressions from what he saw, and he *did* see the snowy Hermon; and Stephens is right in describing from what he saw—and *he could not* see the splendid back-ground which that mountain forms."—*Pict. History of Palestine*, from which work this article is principally compiled.

crowned with the city of Safet. "Nothing can surpass the beauty and grandeur of the surrounding scenery," says Elliott, and he had travelled widely.

But when the heat of the summer's sun has absorbed all the moisture which the earth contained, and dried up the green herbage which gave a cheerful aspect to the scene, the effect of the whole, in the entire absence of trees, is very different—more heavy, sad, but not less, perhaps, in unison with the general tone of feeling with which the Christian pilgrim is prepared to regard this memorable lake. Now that the Arab has removed his tents to the higher country, the eye may wander around its borders vainly seeking for any other signs of habitation than the mean town of Tabaria, (Tiberias,) and one or two miserable villages. How different this view from that which was presented to the eye about the time of Christ! Then the borders of the lake were thickly populated, and the eye rested in turn upon fortresses and cities, towns and villages. There was not only the royal city of Tiberias, but the wo-doomed cities of Chorazin and Capernaum, both the frequent witnesses of His "mighty works"—the latter his most usual place of residence—"exalted unto heaven" once, but now so utterly "cast down" that men know not where it stood. There also was Bethsaida—"the city of Andrew and Peter"—Hippos and Gamala, Tarichea and Beth Meon, Ammaus and the strong Magdala; and doubtless many other places of less note, the names of which history has found no occasion to preserve.

As the waters of the lake lie in a deep basin, surrounded on all sides by lofty hills, except at the entrance and outlet of the Jordan, long-continued tempests from any quarter are unknown. This is also true, for the

17 And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men.

same reasons, of the Dead Sea. But these local features, which preclude any long agitation of its surface, render it liable to whirlwinds, squalls, and sudden gusts. Winds from the south-east are those by which a heavy swell is most usually raised.

The fishing operations upon this lake, which were anciently of so much importance, and connected with which so many interesting events are recorded in the New Testament, have altogether ceased. There is not, or was not very lately, a single boat upon its waters. There were none even in the time of D'Arvieux, (1660.) Hence the country derives but little advantage from the immense quantity of excellent fish which the lake contains.

Verse 17. *Jesus said, Come ye after me*] That is, according to the Jewish sense of the phrase, Become my disciples. One of these "two brethren," Andrew, had certainly been a disciple of the Baptist, and it is more than probable that the other also was. It was to Andrew that John addressed himself at Bethabara, (or Bethany,) when, on observing our Lord pass by, he exclaimed, "Behold the Lamb of God!" John i. 36, 40. It will be recollected that on that occasion Andrew and "another disciple"—supposed to be John the son of Zebedee—followed Jesus, and had an interview with him; and that shortly after, Simon, then likewise at Bethabara, also was introduced to our Lord, on which occasion he received the surname of Peter, though no call to the discipleship. They had thus become personally acquainted with Jesus, and had, perhaps, received such intelligence from John as satisfied them that Jesus was the Messiah. It is likely that these men had continued to the present time to rank



18 And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him.

19 And when he had gone a little farther thence, he saw James the *son* of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets.

themselves with John's followers; but their teacher being now cast into prison, they readily embraced the invitation which Jesus gave them, and attached themselves to his person and ministry, as stated in the following verse. *I will make you fishers of men*] A metaphorical expression denoting that they would be employed in bringing men from moral darkness to the light of the gospel, and thus be instrumental in reconciling sinners to God. Terms of hunting and fishing are often used by classical as well as sacred writers in the sense of conciliating friends or gaining disciples. So Plato compares the teacher of wisdom to a fisher; and Solomon says, Prov. xi. 30, "He that winneth—margin, *taketh*—souls is wise."

Verse 18. *Straightway*] Immediately—as every one should do on hearing the invitation of the gospel. *They forsook their nets, &c.*] Their nets were their means of living—perhaps all their property; and whether intrinsically worth little or much, the sacrifice, to them, must have been considerable. By thus voluntarily leaving their property for the sake of Jesus, they evidenced the sincerity of their devotion. Like the great apostle of the Gentiles, they seem to have "counted all things but loss, that they might win Christ." So it behooves us to forsake all that comes in competition with our duty, and resolutely to follow the Saviour in the path of holy living.

Verse 19. *James and John*] This James is sometimes called the greater, to distinguish him from James the "brother of our Lord." Both he and John are supposed

20 And straightway he called them : and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him.

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to have been followers of the Baptist. *Mending their nets*] For they also were fishers. There is in this little incident one of those minute and evidently undesigned coincidences, that go far to establish the truth of any narrative in which they are found.

Verse 20. *They left their father with the hired servants*] This is one of those passages which furnish a refutation that Mark's gospel is merely an abridgment of that of Matthew, for Matthew says nothing about "the hired servants." The question may be asked, Why did Jesus choose these poor, ignorant fishermen to become the preachers of his gospel, when he might have called better-instructed and more influential persons to that work? Doubtless, *in part*, that the success with which their future labours was attended might plainly be the result of divine agency, and not the mere ordinary effect of human instrumentality. 1 Cor. i. 27, 28. These men and their successors were to be, under Christ, the instruments of overthrowing the stupendous and imposing system of paganism and idolatry throughout the world, and thus of producing the greatest change, the most general and important revolution, in principles, in morals, and in religion, that ever took place on this globe. If they had generally been men of rank and distinction, of wealth and eminence,—if they had been esteemed for their knowledge, literature, or political influence,—the success of the gospel might have been attributed, by its enemies at least, to mere human influences: but by this choice all such pretence was destroyed. As in the call of these disciples, so also in the onward march of Chris-

## LUKE v. 1-11.

1 And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret,

2 And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing *their* nets.

3 And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.

tianity, it is still true that "not *many* noble, not *many* mighty," in the world's estimation, become either teachers or pupils in the school of Christ. The reason why more such have not embraced this religion probably is, that its requirements are too humiliating and denying.

## LUKE v. 1-11.

Verse 1. *It came to pass, &c.*] It is not unlikely that Jesus had been in Capernaum about one week when the incidents thus introduced took place. *The people pressed to hear the word of God*] So anxious were they to obtain instruction that they flocked to him in crowds, attracted, doubtless, by the fame of his miraculous cure of the nobleman's son, John iv. 46-54, and the rumour of his ill treatment at Nazareth. The phrase, "word of God," may be understood as equivalent, in its import, to "the gospel."

Verses 2, 3. *Saw two ships standing by the lake*] Campbell observes that the vessels here termed "ships" were in reality large fishing boats. Josephus states that at one time there were about two hundred and thirty of them on the lake, to each of which four or five men were usually attached. "Standing by the lake" means, hauled

4 Now, when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.

5 And Simon answering, said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing : nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.

6 And when they had this done, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes ; and their net brake.

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up on the beach—aground. The fishermen had thus secured their vessels, and were now engaged in washing their nets, after an unsuccessful night's labour. *He, Jesus, entered into one of the ships, &c.*] That he might the more easily and advantageously address the people, they seeing and hearing better than they otherwise could have done, and he freed from the inconvenience of their "pressing upon him." It must have been a scene of thrilling sublimity, as well as of great beauty ; and the still waters would convey the sound of the speaker's voice to the eagerly-listening multitude with great distinctness.

Verse 4. *He said unto Simon*] To whom, we are informed, the boat belonged ; and who, together with some others, was with him in the vessel. This was when he had "left off speaking" to the people. *Launch out into the deep, &c.*] That is, put off from the vicinity of the shore into deep water. The word rendered "draught" is a sporting phrase, signifying to catch prey—here, to *take* fishes. Christ was now about to give to Simon and his partners a strongly-marked proof of his supernatural character.

Verses 5, 6. *Master, we have toiled all night, &c.* "The word here translated 'master' properly denotes one who is set over any persons or business, and is therefore used as equivalent to 'master' or teacher." The night is generally allowed to be a better time for fishing than the

7 And they beckoned unto *their* partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.

day, as experience has shown that the fish are then more usually on the alert, and consequently more readily caught. Simon's remark, that they "had toiled all night and taken nothing," renders the miracle which followed the more striking, because it shows either that the fish did not then abound in that part of the sea, or kept close to their haunts. *At thy word, &c.*] At thy command—thy bidding. We should never neglect the calls of Providence from the thought that we may not succeed; nor, indeed, for any other reason. Peter had toiled all night in vain; yet, when Jesus gave the command, he tried again; and his obedience was well rewarded. *Their net brake*] Began to break, or was well-nigh breaking. "This is all that is implied in the Greek word." This miracle places in a strong light our Lord's true character as the "mighty God;" for who, but He, could have brought so vast an assemblage of prey into the meshes, and that, too, when skilful fishermen had been employed "all night" without the least success?

Verse 7. *They beckoned unto their partners*] James and John, &c., (verse 10,) who, it would seem, had resumed the interrupted employment of "washing their nets." *They began to sink*] They were ready to sink; were in danger of sinking. Thus even success may produce danger. What an astonishing exercise of power was here evinced: yet how much more divine was that energy which, by means of one of these illiterate men, converted at once three thousand souls! This whole transaction was symbolical—a mode of teaching by signi

8 When Simon Peter saw *it*, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

9 For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken:

10 And so *was* also James and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.

ficant action. Our Lord's design in it was to point out to the disciples the success they should have in the work of preaching the gospel.

Verse 8. *Simon—fell down at Jesus' knees, &c.*] Overwhelmed with astonishment and awe. It would appear that in the surprise and consternation of the moment Peter regarded Christ as a manifestation of Deity. His "falling down at Jesus' knees" was either a posture of supplication (as with the ancients the *knees* were consecrated to mercy) or of adoration. The latter seems most probable. *Depart from me, &c.*] This language should not, perhaps, be construed into a penitential confession of sin; nor is it to be understood merely as an exclamation expressive of humility and unworthiness. It is probably indicative of a mingled feeling of guilt, dread, and awe. The nearness of the divine presence, realized, so to speak, either in vision or thought, by the unrenewed man, uniformly brings his sinful character to his remembrance, and makes him feel that he cannot stand acquitted before infinite justice and purity. The impression is always one of guilty dread, till he is taught that there is "a new and living way" by which he may draw near to God without danger—and that is, by the atonement of Christ.—*Watson.*

Verse 10. *Jesus said, Fear not*] By this bland, mild

11 And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.

MARK i. 21-28.

21 And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the sabbath-day he entered into the synagogue, and taught.

address, he sought to allay the disturbed state of the disciples' minds. *From henceforth thou shalt catch men*] See on Mark i. 17, p. 316. Bloomfield observes: "The words are well rendered by Dr. Parr; [Ye have been catching *fish* to *destroy* them;] henceforth ye shall catch *men*, to *save* them." Although Peter only is addressed here, it was as the representative of the four disciples, who were, equally with himself, thus called to the ministry of the gospel of Christ.

Verse 11. *They forsook all, &c.*] Meaning, probably, that henceforth they no longer followed their occupation of fishing for a livelihood, but attached themselves to the person and ministry of Christ. It is matter of dispute among critics whether the transactions so circumstantially detailed by Luke are identical with the call of the disciples Peter, Andrew, James, and John, as narrated by Matthew and Mark. (Matt. iv. 18-22; Mark i. 16-20.) If the evangelists refer to one and the same event, as they probably do, it would seem that the inspiration by which they were severally guided extended no further than to preserve them from error in their statements, leaving them at full liberty to publish or suppress such incidents as they thought proper: and that Matthew and Mark had materially abridged their narratives, while that of Luke is more full and particular.

MARK i. 21-28.

Verse 21. *On the sabbath, &c.*] The original implies

22 And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes.

23 And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out,

24 Saying, Let *us* alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God.

that this was the first sabbath after the call of the disciples; and it is not unlikely that it was the day following that event. This was, probably, the first of Christ's teaching in the synagogue of Capernaum.

Verse 22. *They were astonished at his doctrine*] Possibly, because of the clearness of his expositions, the spirituality of the law, as exhibited by him, and the searching application of the truth to the conscience. See also on Luke iv. 32, p. 310. *As one having authority*] In an authoritative, though not dogmatical manner: as one having an inherent, self-derived power and right, not only to *expound*, but to *enact* law, and to require obedience. As such, he would appear to be, what he really is, the head of all ecclesiastical authority; who alone has the prerogative of appointing spiritual teachers. *And not as the scribes*] Whose teachings are said to have consisted very much in vain disputations and trifling controversies. The scribes were also much in the habit of appealing to their doctors as authority for the correctness of their statements; but Christ put aside all human teachings, and asserted his own authority: hence his frequent mode of expression, *But I say unto you*.—*Watson*.

Verses 23, 24. *There was a man with an unclean spirit*] Luke says, "A spirit of an unclean demon," that is, he was under demoniacal influence. "Unclean" may mean wicked, evil. *He cried out*] Luke says, "with a



loud voice." *Let us alone*] The word rendered "let us alone," is said by Robinson to be an interjection expressing wonder, complaint, indignation, &c., as *ah! alas!* &c. It was the demon, not the man, who cried out; though he might, possibly, have used the man's organs of speech. *What have we to do with thee*] Clarke supposes the import of these words to be, "What business hast thou with us?" Campbell renders, "What hast thou to do with us?" Either view conveys an intimation not only that the demon feared being dispossessed, but that he considered the ejection would be an unauthorized interference on the part of Christ. It is possible that the man had, by his love of wickedness, voluntarily subjected himself to the influence of this evil spirit. *Art thou come to destroy us*] Some able commentators suggest that the word here rendered "destroy" does not imply the final doom of these evil spirits by their being consigned to the torments of endless punishment; but the destruction of their power over the minds and affections of men: which work Jesus accomplished by the transforming influences of the Holy Ghost, who creates within the believing heart an opposition to sin, and power to overcome the "works of the devil." St. John declares that it was for this very purpose Jesus came into the world. 1 John iii. 8. From the plural number being used, it would seem there was more than one demon present; though the one which spoke may have been the chief. *I know thee—the Holy One, &c.*] "The Most Holy" is an appellation given to the Messiah in Dan. ix. 24; and in Psa. xvi. 10, he is called "thy Holy One." "Very naturally," remarks Mr. Watson, "did this wretched demon fix upon this title and character of the Messiah; for it is the holiness of Christ which invests him with terrors to all the wicked,

25 And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him.

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whether men or devils." Query. Is not the acquaintance with Christ's true character evinced by this demon a proof of his possessing superhuman knowledge?

Verse 25. *Jesus rebuked him*] That is, "rebuked" the "unclean spirit," whom he instantly commanded to "come out of" the man. "In all this Jesus did not once address the *man*: his conversation was with the *evil spirit*; proving conclusively that the case was not one of mere natural disease or derangement, but that he conversed with a being who was distinct from, though residing in, the man." It has been conjectured that the reason why our Lord commanded the evil spirits whom he ejected, on this and other occasions, to "hold their peace" when they declared his true character was, lest the people should think he and they acted in unison, and that the dispossessions were mere pretence. He thus, also, displayed his complete power over Satan and his servants, and his abhorrence of them.

"The reality of demoniacal possessions has been denied by some authors, and attempts have been made by others to account for them, either as the effect of natural disease, or the influence of imagination on persons of a nervous habit. But it is manifest that the persons who in the New Testament are said to be *possessed by devils* (more correctly, by demons) cannot mean merely persons afflicted with some strange disease; for they are evidently distinguished from the diseased. Further, Christ's speaking on various occasions to these evil spirits, as distinct from the persons possessed by them,—his commanding them and asking them questions, and receiving answers from them, or not suffering them to speak,—and several

26 And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him.

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circumstances relating to the terrible preternatural effects which they had upon the possessed, and to the manner of Christ's evoking them,—particularly their requesting and obtaining permission to enter the herd of swine, (Matt. vii. 31, 32,) and precipitating them into the sea: all these circumstances can *never* be accounted for by any distemper whatever. Nor is it any reasonable objection that we do not read of such frequent possessions before or since the appearance of our Redeemer upon earth. It seems, indeed, to have been ordered by a special providence that they should be permitted to be *then* more common; in order that He who came to destroy the works of the devil might the more remarkably and visibly triumph over him.”—*Horne*.

Verse 26. *When the unclean spirit had torn him, &c.*] Luke says, “had thrown him in the midst.” Both phrases are supposed to denote that “the spirit” threw the man into violent convulsions. As this was possibly the usual manner in which the diabolic agent displayed his influence, it has been suggested that the form of disease he had induced was the epilepsy, or falling sickness, “so called from the patient falling suddenly to the ground on an attack of this disease. It consists of convulsions with sleep, and usually froth issuing from the mouth.”—*Hooper's Med. Dict.* *He came out of him*] Luke adds, “and hurt him not.” It would seem from this expression that the “spirit” had malignantly put forth his utmost effort to destroy the man, though his attempt was specially counteracted; and the violent contortions and fearful sufferings he brought upon his victim, in this his last desperate attempt, served but to make more manifest the

27 And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him.

28 And immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee.

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power of his conqueror. Although he "came out," his submission was evidently forced—not his own choice; and in obeying he inflicted all the injury he could. This is the nature of an evil disposition. The evident superiority of Jesus should encourage the believer to put all confidence in him; assured that, though called to contend with "principalities, and powers, and wicked spirits," Eph. vi. 12, the grace of Christ shall be abundantly sufficient for him.

"Jesus, the Name high over all,  
In hell, or earth, or sky;  
Angels and men before it fall,  
And devils fear and fly."

Verse 27. *What thing—what new doctrine is this?* The people were greatly astonished at what they heard and saw, and eagerly asked of each other an explanation of so extraordinary a matter. By "new doctrine" is meant *mode of teaching*; and that they were "amazed," not merely at the *fact* of the casting out of the demon, but at the *manner*, as marked with peculiar *authoritativeness*, is clear from the parallel passage in Luke, "They—spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this! for with *authority*," &c. "As in his preaching Jesus referred not to human authority, nor appeared as a mere interpreter of law, but spoke from an authority in himself, so he did not cast out demons, as the Jewish exorcists did, or professed to do, by appealing to the name of another, or by

## LESSON XXI. [Date, A. D. 27.

*Christ heals Peter's mother-in-law—He commences his first tour through Galilee, teaching the people, and curing the diseased.*—MATT. iv. 23–25 ; viii. 14–17 ; MARK i. 29–39 ; LUKE iv. 38–44.

## MARK i. 29–39.

AND forthwith, when they were come out of the synagogue, they entered into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.

30 But Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever ; and anon they tell him of her.

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any distinct act of reference to superior power, but he spoke authoritatively as from himself, and the effect followed. This was the particular which excited the astonishment of the whole congregation ; from which it follows that our Lord placed himself, in the manner of working his miracles, above all mere men,—even the greatest prophets.”—*Watson*. The manner in which his miracles were wrought proves him to be supreme ; and if supreme, he is God.

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## NOTES ON MARK i. 29–39.

Verses 29, 30. *They entered into the house of Simon, &c.*] Directly after the casting out of the “unclean spirit,” as noticed in the lesson immediately preceding. It appears that Simon and Andrew resided in the same house—probably as one family. *Simon's wife's mother lay sick*] Luke says, with a “great fever.” *Anon*] Immediately. *They tell him*] Luke says, (iv. 38,) “they besought him for her ;” that is, solicited Jesus to cure her, though perhaps without expecting him to do so on that day, it being the sabbath.

31 And he came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up; and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them.

32 And at even, when the sun did set, they brought into him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils.

33 And all the city was gathered together at the door.

34 And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him.

Verse 31. *He took her by the hand, &c.*] Having first, as we are informed by Luke, “rebuked” the disease. *Immediately the fever left her, &c.*] The cure was instantaneous and complete, as is evident from the fact that “she arose and ministered to them.” The elements of nature—the restless seas and boisterous winds—the fiercest diseases and most malignant demons—acknowledge his authority and yield to his rebuke.

Verse 32. *At even, when the sun did set, &c.*] That is, at the close of the sabbath. The Jews began and ended their day in the evening, at set of sun. Lev. xxiii. 32. The hours of the sacred day having now closed, the people eagerly brought unto him, at the house of Peter, their diseased friends, that he might heal them; having abstained from doing so during the sabbath, that they might not violate it.

Verses 33, 34. *All the city was gathered together, &c.*] A popular mode of speech signifying a great number. *He healed many sick—cast out many devils*] There is in this passage, as also in the parallel one, Matt. viii. 16, an instance of the distinction made by the evangelists between casting out demons and healing diseases; and to which reference was made in the note on Mark i. 25. An essential distinction between the cases could not be more

clearly marked. The terms employed fully refute the notions of those who resolve demoniacal possessions into those bodily diseases with which the possessed were often afflicted at the same time. Let it be borne in mind, that He who thus displayed his benevolence and power has also invited the spiritually diseased to come unto him, that they may find "rest unto their souls." *He suffered not the devils to speak*] "Because," says Bishop Hall, "he would not have him who is the 'father of lies' to slander and disgrace the truth by his testimony."

Matthew (viii. 17) states that these cures were performed "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah,"—meaning, that thus *was fulfilled* what had been predicted by Isaiah,—“saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.” The passage referred to is Isa. liii. 4, “Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.” The rendering in Matthew, it will be perceived, differs considerably in phraseology from the text in Isaiah: the import, however, is the same. “The only difficulty,” says Mr. Watson, “lies in this application of the words of the prophet to the *taking* and *bearing* of bodily diseases, when they refer primarily to the taking away of sin, by those vicarious sufferings of the Messiah of which Isaiah unquestionably speaks. Through that atonement all our blessings come; and as all our sufferings are the consequences of sin, none of them could have been removed had not propitiation been made for sin, and the right to deliver us from all its consequences been acquired by our Redeemer.” Nor are we to suppose that Christ “bore our griefs and carried our sorrows” by actual vicarious suffering only when upon the cross. He bore them, as the penalty of sin, in his agony as well as at his crucifixion; and often previously, whenever he

35 And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.

“groaned in spirit” and was “troubled.” The whole mass of this world’s wo lay upon his spirit from the beginning of his earthly existence to its end; for as his office was to take away “the sin of the world,” he must first bear its weight. It is in this sense Matthew says, “he took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses;” not, certainly, by transferring the infirmities and sicknesses to his own person, for he became neither infirm nor sick: but he took them and carried them as a *load* or *burden*, the sustaining of which was a part of the process of the great atonement. In the strictest sense, therefore, the prophecy quoted by the evangelist was here “fulfilled;” not indeed fully, for Christ had much more to sustain; but still directly and properly.

Verse 35. *In the morning, a great while before day*] While there was yet some appearance of night. Luke says, “when it was day;” meaning, at *break of day* *He went into a solitary place, and prayed*] This act shows our Lord to have been, as man, a person of ardent piety; and affords an admirable lesson to his followers, which all may and ought to practise. Observe his diligent improvement of time—he *rose very early*; and the manner in which the first moments of “incense breathing morn” were employed by him—in communion with God. “He that wishes to *enjoy* religion,” says an excellent practical writer, “will seek a place of secret prayer in the morning.” But while early rising and early devotional exercises are the duty and advantage of all, they are peculiarly necessary to the public religious teacher, whose model, in all such things, is Christ.



36 And Simon, and they that were with him, followed after him.

37 And when they had found him, they said unto him, All *men* seek for thee.

38 And he said unto them, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also : for therefore came I forth.

39 And he preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and cast out devils.

MATT. iv. 23-25.

23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom,

Verses 36, 37. *Simon and they that were with him* Simon and the other disciples. *Followed him*] *Eagerly* sought him. The original implies the ardent desire they had of finding Jesus.—*Bloomfield*. *All men seek thee*] Meaning that many did so—the inquiry for him was general.

Verse 38. *Let us go into the next towns, &c.*] This seems to have been said in answer to their implied request, that he would go and meet the multitude. It is presumable that he returned with the disciples to Capernaum, and proclaimed the gospel to the eager multitude : after which, notwithstanding their solicitations to the contrary—for Luke says, “they stayed him, that he should not depart from them,” meaning, they wished to detain him—he left Capernaum “to preach the kingdom of God to other cities also :” thus commencing his first tour of Galilee.

MATT. iv. 23-25.

Verse 23. *Jesus went about all Galilee*] Not to the principal cities or towns merely, but, apparently, to almost every city, town, and village. Mark's testimony is, “he preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee.”

and healing all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease among the people.

24 And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were pos-

*Teaching in their synagogues*] It has been questioned by what right Christ and his apostles taught in the Jewish synagogues. In answer, Dr. Lightfoot observes, that this permission was granted to prophets and workers of miracles, and to heads and leaders of new sects, that thus the people might have an opportunity of becoming acquainted with their doctrines. Under these characters Christ and his apostles were admitted to this privilege.—*Jennings*. For an account of the “synagogues,” see on Luke iv. 16, p. 294. *The gospel of the kingdom*] The word translated “gospel,” properly means *glad tidings*. The “kingdom” referred to is that dispensation of grace and mercy which Christ was to establish in the earth, and which is sometimes spoken of as the *reign of God*. The phrase, “preaching the gospel of the kingdom,” then, means the proclaiming the joyful announcement that this kingdom was about to be established; and the reason of its being called “the gospel of the kingdom” is, that in these announcements the nature, benefits, and requirements of that kingdom were set forth. *Sickness and disease*] The word rendered “sickness” denotes a *thoroughly formed disorder*—one of some standing; that rendered “disease,” an *incipient indisposition*, or temporary malady.—*Bloomfield*.

Verse 24. *His fame*] The report of his wonderful sayings and doings; especially the miraculous cures he performed. *Went throughout all Syria*] By “Syria” is probably meant the country north and north-east of Gali-

lee, where Jesus now was. The imperfect state of medical science in the East at the present day (and it may not have been much better when Christ tabernacled among men) frequently furnishes the European visiter, especially if known to be a practitioner of the healing art, with striking illustrations of the eagerness with which the "sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments" were brought to and forced on the attention of the benevolent Saviour. Morier, in his "Travels in Persia," remarks: "The news that a foreign hakeem or doctor was passing through the country very soon spread abroad; and at every halt our camp was thronged with the sick, not only of the village near to which we were encamped, but of all the surrounding villages. Many came several days' journey to consult our doctor, and were brought to him in spite of every difficulty and inconvenience." Unhappily, these also supplied an illustration of the conduct of the Jews in another respect; for though the required medical attendance and remedies were uniformly furnished gratuitously, "it is grievous to say," observes Mr. Morier, "in very few instances did they meet with corresponding gratitude." By "divers diseases and torments" Mr. Watson suggests "are probably meant those torturing spasmodic affections to which the people of those countries are liable, as tetanus, spasmodic cholera, &c." *Lunatic*] Persons afflicted with a species of derangement, and whose disease was erroneously supposed to increase or diminish in strength with the increase or lessening of the moon: hence the name, from *luna*, the Latin for moon. The ailment is thought to be the same as that noticed Mark i. 23-26; Luke iv. 33-35. *Palsy*] This is defined to be "a sudden loss of tone and vital power in a certain part of the human body. It may affect

sessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them.

25 And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judea, and from beyond Jordan.

#### LUKE v. 12-16.

12 And it came to pass, when he was in a certain city, behold a man full of leprosy; who, seeing Jesus, fell on *his* face, and besought him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

a limb, the whole side, or the entire body. Incurable, except in its slighter stages." *He healed them*] Not by applying remedies, but by the exercise of his will; thus proving all diseases to be under his control.

Verse 25. *There followed him great multitudes, &c.*] People from all parts of Palestine. "Galilee" lay in the northern, and "Jerusalem" in the southern portion of the Holy Land. "Decapolis" is commonly supposed to be a district containing ten detached and widely separated cities; the word *deka*, in the Greek language, meaning ten, and *polis*, a city. In the enumeration of these cities writers are not agreed; Josephus says that Scythopolis, a city on the west of Jordan, was one of them; and that the remaining nine lay east of that river. From "beyond Jordan" means east thereof; and refers, probably, to the country of Perea.

#### LUKE v. 12-16.

Verse 12. *When he, Christ, was in a certain city*] It is not now known what "city" is here referred to. Dr. Clarke suggests Chorazin or Bethsaida. It appears tolerably certain that Capernaum cannot be intended, as well from the indefiniteness of Luke's expression, who would

not be likely to speak thus of so important a place as Capernaum, as the distinction seemingly made by Mark. Compare Mark i. 39, 40, with ii. 1. *A man full of leprosy*] According to Dr. Good, there are in the East three species of leprosy, (Jahn, in his Biblical Archæology, says four,) one of which is not infectious, and does not render the person unclean; the other species are infectious, and, to some extent, hereditary. The leper here spoken of was suffering from contagious leprosy; and to this species the remainder of this note is devoted. The disease generally exhibits itself in the form of one or more small bright spots on the surface of the body, more particularly on the face. There is, however, reason to suppose that the disorder is deeply seated in the bones and marrow before its existence is made known by these blotches. As it increases in virulence and strength these spots enlarge, and assume the appearance of whitish dry scales, which ultimately become thick scabs, with raw flesh immediately beneath. It is because of this feature that the disease is called leprosy, from a Greek word which signifies *a scale*. Thus Miriam is said to have become "leprous, *white as snow*." Num. xii. 10.

"The progress of the disease, subsequently to its appearance on the external surface of the body, is far from being rapid. A person who is leprous from his birth may live fifty years; one who in after life is infected with it may live twenty years; but they will be years of such dreadful misery as rarely fall to the lot of man in any other situation." "There is a form of the disease in which it commences at the extremities: the joints separate; the fingers, toes, and other members fall off; and the malady gradually approaches the seat of life." Mr. Barker, when at Damascus in 1825, describing the hos-

pital of Christian lepers, says : "Some were without noses and fingers, and others differently disfigured." The wretched victim is thus doomed to see himself dying piecemeal, assured that no human power can arrest for a moment the silent and steady march of this stealthy foe.

"Among the heathen the leprosy was considered to be inflicted by their gods, by whom alone, it was supposed, the disease could be removed : and the same notion appears to have prevailed among the Israelites ; for when the king of Syria sent Naaman to the king of Israel, to heal him of his leprosy, the latter exclaimed, 'Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto ME, to recover a man of his leprosy ?' 2 Kings v. 7."

Lepers, among the Hebrews, were obliged to live separate from the rest of the people, because of the danger of spreading the contagion by promiscuous intercourse ; Num. v. 1-4 ; xii. 14-16 ; and when abroad, beyond their own quarters, had to appear with "a torn dress, bare head, and chin covered : and when any person not a leper approached, to make known their own situation by crying out 'Unclean ! unclean !' that contact might be avoided. Lev. xiii. 45, 46. They were also accounted ceremonially unclean, and as such forbid to assemble with the people in the public acts of religion.

This disease has been considered a striking emblem of moral pollution, or sin ; and the exclusion of persons infected with it from the worship and people of God was fitted not only to humble and reform the offenders, but also to impress upon the mind the most solemn and useful instructions.

*Fell on his face*] Bowed himself to the earth—the Eastern method of paying obeisance. *Lord, if thou wilt,*

13 And he put forth *his* hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately the leprosy departed from him.

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*thou canst make me clean*] It is not clear that the word "Lord," here, implies superiority of *nature*, though it may of rank. The term was frequently used by the Jews in addressing their superiors, and was deemed to be equivalent to *master*. The leper must have either seen or heard of the miracles performed by Jesus; and, satisfied that the power which could cast out devils with a word, and perform "other wonderful works," was fully equal to the cure of his own case, he confidently says, "If thou *wilt*, thou canst *make me clean*,"—meaning, canst heal me. Bloomfield remarks that the word rendered "clean" is "one used peculiarly of healing leprosy, and has reference to the legal impurity incurred by the disease, which could only be removed by the cure of the disorder." The leper's declaration of faith in the ability of Christ to restore him, is also to be understood as a request that he would do so: thus agreeing with Mark's statement, that he came "beseeching" him.

Verse 13. *He, Jesus, put forth his hand and touched him*] By the Mosaic law, any one who came in contact with a leper was rendered ceremonially unclean. (It is presumed that priests, in the discharge of their duty of examining and pronouncing on cases of leprosy, were an exception to this rule.) Jesus may be supposed to have touched the leper, both to create in him confidence that he not only had the *ability* but the *disposition* to heal him, and to satisfy the people that, so far from receiving pollution himself, he did really convey health to the diseased man by that touch. *I will—be thou clean*] Here

14 And he charged him to tell no man; but go, and show thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

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the hidden divinity of our Lord again breaks forth. As he taught "with authority," he heals with authority; and the very *manner* places him infinitely above the highest commissioned servant: I WILL—BE THOU CLEAN! No wonder this language has reminded critics of the sublime sentence, "Let there be light! and there was light." It was the Most High who spake.—*Watson. Immediately the leprosy departed*] As does an obedient servant at the bidding of his master. What an astonishing sight! A man whose whole body was covered with the outbreakings of a most loathsome disease, cleansed from it in a moment of time! As this leper was healed through faith in the great Physician, so the vilest sinner that breathes may come to the same compassionate deliverer, and presenting the urgent, believing petition, "If thou wilt thou canst make me clean," realize the removal of his spiritual malady, and find, through Christ, "pardon, holiness, and heaven." Faith in Christ, and that only, can purify from the leprosy of sin. Reader, dost thou believe?

Verse 14. *Go, show thyself to the priest*] At Jerusalem. The law of Moses required all persons healed of the leprosy to repair forthwith to a priest, to be examined by him, that if, on such inspection, the priest should be satisfied they were really cured, he might, after certain purifications, restore them to their privileges in society and the church. See Lev. xiv. 2, &c. It seems to have been for this reason that Jesus directed the leper "to tell no man" of his cure, but to proceed at once to the proper authority, that the priest might pronounce him



15 But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities.

16 And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed.

clean on an unbiased judgment of the fact. Among the sacrifices and ceremonies directed to be used in purifying the leper is the following remarkable one: The priest was instructed to take two small birds, and to kill one of them over an earthen vessel containing spring water, so that the blood might be mingled with the water. He was then to dip the living bird into this mixture, and sprinkle the leper with it seven times. This ceremony is supposed to be typical of the purification of our souls by the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. *Offer for thy cleansing, &c.*] Moses commanded that the leper, on being pronounced clean, should make an offering of two he lambs and one ewe lamb, about nine quarts of flour, and about three quarters of a pint of olive oil. If poor, his offering might be less expensive. Lev. xiv. 10, 21, 22. *For a testimony unto them*] "Testimony" probably means proof. His being permitted to enter the precincts of the temple to offer his oblation and sacrifices would be public and official evidence, satisfactory both to priests and people, of the reality of his cure. Notwithstanding the strictness of Christ's charge not then to make the cure public, Mark tells us the man "went out and began to blaze abroad the matter." The consequence was, that the people "came to him from every quarter" "to hear, and to be healed of their infirmities."

Verse 16. *Wilderness*] A private, solitary place.

## LESSON XXII. [Date, A. D. 27.

*Jesus returns to Capernaum—Asserts his power to forgive sins—Heals a paralytic.*—MATT. ix. 2-8; MARK ii. 1-14; LUKE v. 17-26.

## MARK ii. 1-14.

AND again he entered into Capernaum after *some* days; and it was noised that he was in the house.

2 And straightway many were gathered together, inso-much that there was no room to receive *them*, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them.

3 And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four.

## NOTES ON MARK ii. 1-14.

Verse 1. *He, Jesus, entered into Capernaum, &c.*] After the completion of his first circuit of Galilee. It is not known how long our Lord was engaged in his itinerancy; Greswell suggests from three to four months. Matthew, ix. 2, calls Capernaum Christ's "own city," because he had made it the principal place of his abode. *It was noised he was in the house*] Meaning, in the house in which he commonly sojourned when at Capernaum, supposed to be the residence of Peter.

Verse 2. *About the door*] Meaning, probably, the interior court, or yard. See below. Luke says that among his auditors were "Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by," who had come from various parts of the country. Luke v. 17. *He preached the word, &c.*] Instructed the people in his doctrines.

Verses 3, 4. *Palsy*] See on Matt. iv. 24, p. 334. *Borne of four*] Carried on a litter by four men. *Could not come nigh*] The "press" or crowd of people being

4 And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was : and when they had broken *it* up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay.

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too great. *They uncovered the roof, &c.*] Having ascended, as Luke observes, "upon the housetop ;" probably by an exterior flight of stairs, with which the house was, in all likelihood, furnished, in accordance with frequent usage. Mark xiii. 15. *They let down the bed, &c.*] 'Through the opening they made by "breaking up" the roof, or "tiling," as Luke has it. In order more clearly to comprehend the import of this verse, it may be well to glance at the construction of an eastern house, at least in so far as to render the subject intelligible. The information is chiefly drawn from the Pictorial Bible. Oriental houses, according to this authority, do not, as with us, front the street, toward which they present only a low door of entrance, with perhaps a small lattice or latticed balcony, which precludes observation from without. This destitution of doors and lights gives to their dwellings, in the estimation of Europeans and Americans, a very gloomy appearance. From the door a passage or hall conducts into an interior court, toward which the building fronts. The apartments on the ground floor are usually occupied as cellars, offices, and storerooms ; the *family* apartments being above, on the first floor. In front of the range of inhabited rooms is a gallery or piazza, from five to eight feet wide, into which they all open ; it is protected in front by a strong balustrade, and is slightly roofed over, the roof on a level with that of the house, though distinct from it. It was probably a part of *this* roof that the friends of the palsied man removed, for it is almost incredible that they should "break up" the roof of the house itself. It is well known

that the tops of houses are, in the East, much used as places of recreation and study, and even as sleeping apartments, during the warm season; and they are consequently built in a very substantial manner; a thick mass of earth and clay, duly tempered, being compactly laid on the reeds, branches, &c., which immediately cover the beams, thus forming a strong terrace. It cannot be that it was such a roof the men "broke up;" for to say nothing of the damage, which would have been very great, the room below would have been inundated with a mass of dirt and rubbish. No Oriental would think of gaining access to an apartment by such a process. A balustrade or wall runs round the roof, (Deut. xxii. 8,) usually about six feet high next the street and adjoining houses, but not more than three on the side next the yard. The communication between the dwelling rooms and offices below is by an external stair, and from one of the corners of the gallery a covered staircase generally conducts to the housetop, which is flat.

The opinion of the editor of the Pictorial Bible is, that our Lord probably addressed the people from some such gallery as that above referred to, the scribes and Pharisees being seated there with him, or occupying places in the room or rooms immediately behind him, while the mass of the people were congregated in the yard beneath: and that the "uncovering the roof" is to be understood of the removing a part of the roof of the *gallery*, which, being very thin, could be easily done. In proof of the slight manner in which the roof of these galleries is constructed, the editor observes, "We have ourselves repeatedly witnessed single persons cautioned from venturing upon it," lest they should break through. He supposes that the persons who carried the paralytic stood on the roof of the

5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.

6 But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts,

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house proper, leaning over the low wall or railing which guarded it, tore up a part of the *roofing of the gallery*, and through the opening lowered their sick friend to the piazza on which Jesus stood.

Verse 5. *When Jesus saw their faith*] Their "faith," or confidence that Christ could cure their sick friend, was exhibited by their determined efforts to force their way into his presence. Probably the palsied man encouraged them to these exertions, for doubtless he also had "faith." *Son, thy sins be forgiven thee*] Matthew, whose account is in some respects more minute than Mark's, observes that Jesus, noticing the faith of this little company, addressed to the invalid a word of encouragement, perhaps with the design of exciting the expectations of all to the utmost—"Son, *be of good cheer*—thy sins be forgiven thee." It may seem strange, that since the man came only to be healed of his bodily ailment, Jesus should, before attending to that, administer to his spiritual malady. The following reasons may be suggested for this procedure: 1st. The disease may have been the direct result of a sinful course of conduct. 2d. The man was probably truly penitent for his past transgressions, "a broken and contrite spirit" having been produced by sanctified affliction. 3d. Clarke states it to have been a maxim among the Jews, "that no diseased person could be healed till all his sins were blotted out;" and if so, the man might have been eagerly looking to God for pardon, which Christ perceiving, he granted him the desire of his heart. Our Lord's words—"thy sins be forgiven"

7 Why doth this *man* thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?

8 And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts?

9 Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, *Thy sins be forgiven thee*; or to say, *Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk*?

—are not to be understood as a prayer, but as a declaration that the man *was* there and then fully pardoned: hence Luke says, “*Thy sins are forgiven thee.*”

Verse 7. *Speak blasphemies*] The literal signification of the word rendered “blasphemy,” is *evil speaking*. In the Scriptures, however, the term not only denotes *reproachful* speeches, but also the ascribing to, or assuming by, an inferior creature, the attributes, perfections, or prerogatives of God, because such conduct is injurious to him. It is in the latter sense that it is here used; for the scribes secretly charged Christ with pretending to do a thing which truly and properly belonged to God, and to no other being; thus assuming the *place* of God. “Who,” said they, “can forgive sins, but God only?” It was this at which they took offence: and had not Jesus Christ been truly God as well as “very man,” their censure would have been just. The Romanists, indeed, in virtue of a forced construction—perhaps *perversion* would be a better term—of certain passages in the Scriptures, do pretend to the authority of forgiving sins:—how justly, let reason and the true sense of the sacred writings determine.

Verses 8, 9. *When Jesus perceived, &c.*] Namely, by a power which was inherent in and proper to him—the attribute of omniscience, or perfect knowledge: Matthew says, “*When he knew their thoughts.*” *Why reason ye,*

10 But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,)

11 I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thy house.

12 And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.

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&c.] Matthew has it, "Wherefore think ye *evil*?" But in what sense were their thoughts "*evil*?" Certainly not in supposing that "God only could forgive sin," but in having formed a rash and injurious opinion of Christ. *Whether is easier*, &c.] That is, which of the two is the "*easier*?" To a mere man both are impossible: for as no man can really forgive sin, so no man can work a true miracle of healing by his own power. To the Christ as God, on the contrary, both acts were equally "*easy*." —Watson. "To say" has the import of authoritatively to pronounce—*so* to say as to produce the effect.

Verse 10. *That ye may know*, &c.] The miracle now wrought was performed both in *proof* of the truth of Christ's assertion, *that he had the power to forgive sins*, and as evidence to those present that he *had exercised that power*; in other words, that the man's sins were actually blotted out.

Verses 11, 12. *Take up thy bed*, &c.] Probably the light, portable mattress stuffed with wool, still commonly used in that country to sleep on. *Immediately he arose*, &c.] Thus giving to all ocular demonstration of the reality of his cure, and by inference, that his sins were forgiven. *They glorified God*] By gratefully acknowledging his power and goodness. So also did the man. Luke v. 25. From Matt. ix. 8 it appears that the people

13 And he went forth again by the sea-side; and all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them.

14 And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him.

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still failed to perceive Christ's true character, supposing that the power by which he acted was *derived*, not original: they "glorified God, *which had given such power unto men.*" We, however, are better instructed, and should ever be ready to pay divine honours unto Jesus. "Thou art the King of glory, O Christ!"

Verses 13, 14. *Went by the sea-side, &c.*] Namely, the sea of Galilee. Capernaum, where Jesus still was, seems to have stood on its shore. *He saw Levi*] Elsewhere called "Matthew." Matt. ix. 9. He was the author of the gospel bearing that name. *At the receipt of custom*] What we might call "the custom-house," or place where duties on goods, &c., were paid. He was a collector of the revenue, and was now at his place of business. *Follow me*] It is generally supposed that this was a call to the ministry. Some commentators are of opinion that Levi was already a disciple. He was afterward ranked among the twelve apostles.



## LESSON XXIII. [Date, A. D. 28.

*Christ visits Jerusalem, and miraculously heals an infirm man at the pool of Bethesda.*

JOHN v. 1-15.

**A**FTER this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

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## NOTES ON JOHN v. 1-15.

Verse 1. *A feast of the Jews*] Probably the *passover*. Mr. Townsend, whose *arrangement* of the New Testament is followed in the Question Book this work is designed to accompany, supposes this feast to be the *pentecost*, and the compiler was formerly of the same mind: further examination has, however, led him to form a different opinion. The interval occurring between the passover mentioned John ii. 23, &c., at which time Jesus is supposed to have entered on his public ministry, and the ensuing pentecost, would have been but *fifty days*, which appears too short a time to allow for the transactions in Judea subsequent to that passover, (John iv. 1, &c.,) the return into Galilee, including a stay of two days at Sychar, (John iv. 40,) the visits to Cana, (iv. 46,) to Nazareth, (Luke iv. 16, &c.,) to Capernaum, (iv. 31, &c.,) and the incidents occurring there, and the tour through "all Galilee," for the purpose of instructing the people and confirming the word spoken by "signs following." *Jesus went up to Jerusalem*] Partly, perhaps, to show his respect to the law, and partly that he might have an opportunity of instructing the immense concourse who were then assembled in the metropolis. If this feast were, as is above suggested, that of the passover, our Lord had probably been absent from Jerusalem nearly twelve months, for we have no account of his being at the capital since the previous passover.

2 Now there is at Jerusalem, by the sheep-market, a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches.

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Verse 2. *There is at Jerusalem, &c.]* Because the *present*, and not the *past* tense is here used, it has been argued that John wrote his gospel before the destruction of Jerusalem. To this criticism it is replied, 1st. That the expression may mean nothing more than that the *pool* was still in existence; 2d. That the word translated “is” may be used for *was*. *By the sheep-market]* The word *markai* has been inserted by our translators, as is shown by its being printed in *italic*; perhaps the vacancy existing in the original would have been better supplied by inserting the word *gate* rather than “market;” for the “sheep gate” is mentioned in Neh. iii. 1; xii. 39; but the “sheep market” is nowhere read of in the Scriptures. *A pool—called Bethesda]* A “pool” is a collection of water, as a pond or very small lake. It here denotes a bath. This pool seems to have been reputed for its medicinal properties, and as such to have been a frequent resort for diseased persons. “Bethesda,” or *Beth-chesda*, is a compound word derived from *beth*, house, and *chesda*, mercy, grace, goodness. It was probably called the “house of mercy” because of the benefits resulting to the diseased from bathing in its waters. *Having five porches]* These are supposed to have been small walks, or piazzas, constructed for the convenience of the sick; they were probably roofed, but open on the sides, and separated from each other by side walls. This, in so genial a climate as Judea, would be a sufficient shelter by *day*, and at *night* the patients were doubtless removed. From having “five porches,” or porticoes, the form of the bath is supposed to have been a pentagon.—*Jennings* and

3 In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water.

others. Most modern travellers who have published notices of the Holy Land, are of opinion that the place now known as "the pool of Bethesda" is the same as that here mentioned. It is situated a little to the north of the large open square on which the mosque of Omar stands, near St. Stephen's gate. The "porches" have, of course, disappeared; and the "pool" itself is dry and filled up, though the walls of the ancient reservoir remain, and offer, in the opinion of Chateaubriand, the only example now left at Jerusalem of the architecture of the ancient Jews. Here grow some pomegranates and wild tamarinds, and the western angle is quite full of nopals, or the cochineal tree. Chateaubriand describes the reservoir as being one hundred and fifty feet long and forty wide.

Verse 3. *Impotent folk*] Infirm, sickly persons. The word rather denotes those in a *weak, feeble* state of health, than those suffering acute pain. *Halt*] Lamé, including such chronic diseases as confine one to his bed or room.

*Withered*] Bloomfield says, the original "seems to denote those labouring under 'pining sickness,' such as consumption." Jahn and others think a contraction of some of the muscles of the body to be intended, which caused the parts affected to waste and wither, similar to the cases noticed 1 Kings xiii. 4-6 and Matt. xii. 0

*Moving of the water*] By "moving," here, is meant that state of agitation or commotion—perhaps a kind of bubbling up—which the water sometimes presented, and to which its medicinal properties were owing: for if it had been possessed of healing virtue when in a state of rest, the people would not have "waited" for its "moving."

Verse 4. *For an angel went down at a certain season*

4 For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first, after the troubling of the water, stepped in, was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.

*into the pool, &c.]* The angel's influence appears to have been periodical; and the people, knowing at about what time to expect the "moving of the water," assembled then in the porches. "Troubled" the water simply means, induced the agitated appearance before spoken of. *Whosoever first stepped in was made whole]* No matter what might be the nature of his disease. It is on this fact chiefly that the transaction rests its claim to a supernatural character. God has kindly bestowed on mankind various remedies for disease; and among others, waters impregnated with certain mineral substances to such an extent as to render them highly medicinal. Such are the wells of Bath and Bristol in England, and the springs of Saratoga and Ballston in the United States. But, though these waters are exceedingly efficacious in some diseases, and therefore very valuable, they are of no use—probably worse than useless—in other disorders. Not so, however, with the pool of Bethesda. Whosoever first stepped in, after the troubling of the water, was healed of "*whatsoever disease he had.*" Besides, it appears that but *one* was healed at a time—and he the one "*who first stepped in.*" Can this be accounted for on natural principles? It has been objected, that the Jews were in the habit of attributing many things to the ministry of angels which can be readily accounted for on other principles. Granted; but does that prove any thing in the *present* case? The truth seems to be, that God had "endued the pool with a preternatural healing quality, and in the communication of it employed one of his min-

5 And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years.

6 When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time *in that case*, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?

7 'The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me.

istering spirits."—*Bloomfield*. The whole was probably typical of the fountain opened for the purifying from sin by the atonement of the Messiah.

Verse 5. *An infirmity*] A weakness. Bloomfield remarks, "The disorder was probably *paralysis*; for not only was such the constant tradition of the primitive ages, but no less than *six* medical reasons are given for it by Bartholin." From the long time the man had suffered with the disease, it is fair to assume it to have been considered incurable by human means.

Verse 6. *Wilt thou be made whole*] Jesus found the man lying down, probably in one of the porches. Ascertaining, either by his own prescience, or by converse with him, how long he had been afflicted, he put the above question, the import of which is, Is it thy desire to be healed? not that he doubted the fact, but, probably, to excite within the man a stronger wish—perhaps hope—that he might be restored.

Verse 7. *I have no man, &c.*] How pitiable his condition! The poor man seems to have thought that Jesus meant to question the reality or fervency of his desire to be healed; and he therefore accounts for his seeming neglect, by declaring that he remained uncured because he was both unable to help himself readily, and had no one to assist him. He was therefore poor, and almost friendless, as well as infirm; for if he had not been

8 Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.

9 And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath.

greatly straitened in his circumstances, it is but reasonable to suppose he would have secured the services of some one to assist him. His peculiarly afflictive case recommended him strongly to the sympathies of the compassionate Redeemer.

Verses 8, 9. *Rise, take up thy bed, &c.*] The "bed" was probably nothing more than a stuffed pallet. See on Mark ii. 11. Notwithstanding the apparent unreasonableness of this order, the man does not seem to have hesitated in the least, but, at the bidding of Christ, to have made the attempt to obey, and behold! the limbs which had been all but useless for nearly forty years were suddenly restored to their former activity and power! It was, probably, to test the man's faith that Jesus commanded him to "rise," &c.; and it was through the gracious influence accompanying the direction that he was enabled both to *obey* and *execute* the command. Had he not made the attempt, however, there is no reason to suppose he would have been healed. Thus, too, when the penitent sinner endeavours to cast himself by faith on Christ for salvation, he finds that

Power into strengthless souls he speaks,  
And life into the dead.

*Immediately the man—took up his bed, &c.*] Thus proving, beyond all doubt, the completeness of his cure. It is highly probable, from the length of time the man had been afflicted, that his case was well known in Jerusalem; and the publicity given to the miracle by his carrying home his bed on the sabbath-day precludes entirely the

10 The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath-day ; it is not lawful for thee to carry *thy* bed.

11 He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk.

supposition that any deceit was practised. Indeed, it would appear that the command to carry home the bed was chiefly given with the design of calling public attention to the miracle, and by consequence, to Him who had performed that work.

Verse 10. *The Jews said, &c.*] Not those who witnessed the performance of the miracle, but some who met the healed person on his way home. *It is the sabbath*] Either the day of the "holy convocation," which was kept *as a sabbath*, or the period commonly called "the sabbath." *It is not lawful, &c.*] That is, on that day. To carry burdens on the sabbath was deemed by the Jews a violation of the law sanctifying that day, (Exod. xx. 8-10,) and as such was expressly forbidden. Jer. xvii. 21, 22 ; Neh. xiii. 15. They seem, however, to have construed the law in this respect too strictly, taking that for a rule in *all cases* which was only designed to regulate the *general* conduct of the people. Works of necessity and of mercy were ever not only allowable, but obligatory ; and whenever the performance of such clashed with the strict observance of the day of rest, they superseded the law.

Verse 11. *He that made me whole, &c.*] The man seems to have concluded that one who could heal diseases with a word must be at least a good man, and as such would not direct him to do any thing wrong. He may have thought Jesus was a prophet, and as such endowed with power to set aside the law in this particular ;

12 Then asked they him, What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk ?

13 And he that was healed wist not who it was ; for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in *that* place.

14 Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole : sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.

for the Jews are said to have entertained the idea that a prophet was not bound by the fourth commandment. In either view the reasoning would be conclusive.

Verse 12. *Then asked they, What man, &c.*] It is worthy of note that these persons make no inquiry into the circumstances of the cure, but are intent on punishing what they deem an infraction of the law ; and that not so much, perhaps, because it was (in their estimation) a violation of law, as because it made against *their own notions*. So, in the present day, men frequently denounce and persecute each other for opinion's sake, when, if they would candidly and calmly inquire into the *reasons* for this difference, both parties might become less confident of their own infallibility and more disposed to act as friends.

Verse 13. *Wist not*] Knew not. *Jesus had conveyed himself away*] The original implies that our Lord had departed in a private and unnoticed manner, perhaps as soon as the miracle was performed.

Verse 14. *Findeth him in the temple*] In the place of worship, whither the man had doubtless gone to present thanks to God for his recovery. This was, probably, on the day the cure was effected. They who are healed from sickness should seek the sanctuary of the Most High, and give him thanks for his mercy. To neglect this argues ingratitude to, and forgetfulness of God, and is



15 The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus which had made him whole.

highly improper. "I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people." *Sin no more*] From this caution it has been suggested that the disease under which the man had laboured was the direct consequence of former vice. It *may be* that it was. Indulgence in some kinds of wickedness has, most certainly, a baneful influence on bodily health; and *all sin* makes against peace of mind, personal reputation, duty to God, and everlasting happiness: it should therefore be carefully avoided. *Lest a worse thing, &c.*] A "worse thing" than sickness, suffering, and poverty. "The Saviour's remark would apply to any exercise of God's displeasure against sin, whether in this world or the world to come."—*Ripley*. If the man had indeed induced his late illness by a course of vicious conduct, it may be supposed that our Lord meant to give him a proof of his omniscience by showing his knowledge of that fact.

Verse 15. *The man told the Jews that it was Jesus, &c.*] It is likely that "the Jews" spoken of here and in verse 10 were magistrates—perhaps members of the sanhedrim. John occasionally speaks of the rulers in this manner. See i. 19; vii. 13. There is no reason to suppose that the man's intention in making known the author of his cure was a bad one: it proceeded rather from a wish to justify himself from the charge of breaking the sabbath, by referring the act to the command of an undoubted prophet, as also from gratitude to his benefactor, and benevolence to others, by making known the fountain of health. "One might have expected," observes Mr. Wesley, "that when the man had published the name of his benefactor, crowds would have thronged

## LESSON XXIV. [Date, A. D. 28.

*Christ vindicates his conduct in healing the man at the pool of Bethesda, and asserts the dignity of his office.*

## JOHN v. 16-29.

AND therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath-day.

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about Jesus to hear the words of his mouth, and to receive the blessings of the gospel. Instead of this, for an imagined transgression in point of ceremony, they would have put out this light of Israel. Let us not wonder, then, if our good be evil spoken of; if even candour, benevolence, and usefulness do not disarm the enmity of those who, disrelishing the genuine gospel, naturally seek to slander and persecute the professors, but especially the defenders of it."

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## NOTES ON JOHN v. 16-29.

Verse 16. *Therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus*] "Therefore,"—that is, because of the information given, that it was Jesus who had healed the "infirm man" at the pool of Bethesda, and who had commanded him to do an act which was deemed a violation of the sabbath. To "persecute" is *to pursue with intent to injure*. These "Jews" were not the commonalty, but those in authority—the sanhedrim or other magistrates. *Sought to slay him*] To "slay" is to *kill*. By the law of Moses, sabbath-breakers were to be put to death: Exod. xxxv. 2: and had Jesus really violated the statute, the Jews might have clamoured for his blood with some show of reason and justice; but this he had not done. Their conduct is

17 But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.

evidence that they were under the influence of feelings which unfitted them for an impartial and upright discharge of their duties. So great is the power of prejudice.

Verse 17. *Jesus answered, My Father worketh hitherto, &c.* By "Father" our Lord plainly refers to Almighty God. The expression that he "worketh hitherto," &c., means, that from the creation of the world *to that time* his Father had exercised a continual care over the material universe and its inhabitants; had been constantly occupied in sustaining it, and carrying on the work of providence. To this diligent "working" the sabbath had presented no interruption, as is clear from the fact, that if the exercise of his power and superintendence were withheld, no matter for how short a period, the whole would sink into non-entity. Nor is this view contrary to Gen. ii. 2; as God finished the work of creation in six days, and then ceased or rested from that work; but he has never ceased to *govern* and *uphold* the "world which he had made." *And I work*] "Implying that he had the same right, which he could not possibly have unless he were equally a divine person."—*Holden*. *Bloomfield* paraphrases Christ's words thus: "As my Father doth not cease to benefit men on the sabbath, neither am I impeded by any such observance;" and then remarks, "The argument is, that as his Father governed and preserved the world as well on the sabbath as on other days, so he, as Son, had an equal right to perform the work pertaining to his office. But this involved *equality with his Father*, and consequently *essential divinity*. And when the Jews, as was natural, interpreted his words in the sense of claiming equality with God, he did not at-

18 Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.

tempt to remove that notion—which he would have done had they reasoned incorrectly—but confirmed and more expressly asserted it.

Verse 18. *Sought the more, &c.*] Desired the more earnestly to put him to death, because they now regarded him as a blasphemer as well as a sabbath-breaker. *God was his Father*] “Literally, *his own*, or *peculiarly* his Father; his Father in a peculiar sense, quite different from that in which pious men speak of God as their Father.” The assertion which our Lord had made was indeed a very remarkable one; such as no mere man could justly make, and such as could be vindicated only on the ground that he was *not* a mere man. But the Jews recognised in him only what was obvious to their own sight and minds—namely, a human being; and, withal, a human being against whom they were prejudiced, whom they wished to injure, and whose language they were disposed to pervert. Hence they affected to regard him in the light of an impostor, who, in setting up a claim to be *equal with* God, must be supposed to set up a claim in *opposition to* God. Such is the thought in reference to which Jesus made his subsequent address, in which he assured them that, so far from acting in opposition to God, there was the most intimate union in design and operation subsisting between him and the Father. In this address he did not *directly* touch the question whether or not he was a partaker of the divine nature; but left them to draw inferences from statements which would naturally lead to such a conclusion.—*Ripley*.

Verse 19. *The Son can do nothing of himself*] Nothing

19 Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do : for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.

20 For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth him all things that himself doeth : and he will show him greater works than these, that ye may marvel.

of his own will merely ; not because of any *physical*, but of a *moral* impossibility, arising out of the intimate union subsisting between the Father and the Son. He cannot do any thing of his own will and authority, as distinct from the will and authority of the Father, because their acts are accordant. "This," says Mr. Wesley, "is not his imperfection, but his glory." *What he seeth, &c.]* Meaning, what he has a full and perfect knowledge that the Father also doeth. *What things soever he, the Father, doeth, these, &c.]* Not *such* things, but the *same* things : not *some* things, but *all* things. This is as strong an assertion of equality with God as any indirect assertion can possibly be. "God does nothing but what Christ does. What God does is the work of God, and proper to no creature :—Jesus does whatsoever God does, and therefore is no created being."—*Clarke*. Thus this verse presents to us "the Son" and "the Father" as existing in the closest unity or oneness, and yet as distinct persons.

Verse 20. *The Father loveth the Son]* And therefore intrusts him with authority and power. *And showeth him, &c.]* Bloomfield says, the original "literally signifies to show any one how to do a thing, and, by implication, to enable him to do it. It here, as Doddridge observes, has reference to the complete knowledge the Son hath of the whole of the Father's counsels, in every part of their mutual relations ; and expresses the communication

21 For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth *them*; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will.

22 For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son;

of the power to work such wonderful works as God worketh, and even greater, namely, miracles of the most illustrious kind." The phrase is equivalent, therefore, to saying, "The Father communicates to him the power of doing whatever *he* doth." *Greater works*] Greater than healing an "infirm man," and freeing the law of the sabbath from the superstitious and burdensome restrictions by which it was now trammelled. *That ye may marvel*] Meaning that then they *would* "marvel," or be astonished,—not that this power would be conferred or exerted for the *purpose* of causing them surprise.

Verse 21. *As the Father raiseth, &c.*] Meaning, as he hath *power* to raise the dead. For two instances of the exercise of this power, see 1 Kings xvii. 22; 2 Kings iv. 32–36. *Even so the Son quickeneth whom he will*] "Even so" means *in like manner*, or by the exercise of an equal and similar right. To "quicken" is to impart life to an inanimate object. These words may either refer to Christ's power of raising the dead—as in the case of the widow of Nain's son, Luke vii. 14—or to his giving spiritual life to the "dead in trespasses and sins"—as in the case of all truly converted persons. The latter seems the more reasonable supposition. To raise from "the death of sin" to "the life of righteousness" is certainly as strong an evidence of divinity as the quickening the naturally dead into physical life, and is equally in accordance with the context. Christ's "quickeneth whom he will," shows him to have been possessed of equal authority with the Father.

23 That all *men* should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.

Verse 22. *The Father judgeth no man, &c.*] Not directly, though he does by the Son. The Son is here manifestly distinguished from the Father. The "judging" spoken of is probably to be chiefly understood of that act of divine clemency by which the believer is acquitted from the condemnation of sin, and *accounted* righteous, through faith in the atonement; (and which is also an act of Christ in his mediatorial capacity; Acts xiii. 38, 39;) though it may also have reference to the day of general judgment, at the end of the world, when God will "judge the world in righteousness *by that man whom he hath ordained,*" (Jesus Christ,) Acts xvii. 31. This verse furnishes additional proof of the true divinity of Jesus Christ; for whichever of the above interpretations be the true one, it is clear, on the one hand, that "none can forgive sins but God only," while on the other, the power to judge the world supposes ability to read the heart, scan the motives, &c., and consequently implies omniscience. ,

Verse 23. *That all should honour the Son*] Because of these essentially divine attributes dwelling in and being exercised by him. If men do not yield to him the honour required, they violate the design of God, and expose themselves to his tremendous wrath. O, then, "kiss the Son." To "honour" any one is to regard and treat him with the respect and affection which is his due. *Even as they honour, &c.*] "Even as" means to the same extent, in the same manner. Since the Son is to be honoured *even as* the Father, he must be equal to him. And as the honour here claimed for "the Father" is the homage

24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

due to God—*religious* homage and worship—so the honour claimed for Christ must be religious homage. Religiously to worship *any creature* is idolatry; but religious worship is to be paid to Jesus: then Jesus is truly and properly God. See also Heb. i. 6. *He that honoureth not, &c.*] So to dishonour the Son is to dishonour the Father also.

Verse 24. *He that heareth my word*] To “hear,” in this passage, plainly denotes something more than the mere act of *listening with attention*. It means to receive the “word,” that is, the *doctrine*, or *thing taught*, in such a manner as that it shall make a suitable impression, and lead to obedience. The word *hear* is often used in this sense. Isa. lv. 3; John viii. 47; Acts iii. 23. *Believeth on him that sent me*] Namely, God. From this and some other passages of the sacred writings we learn, that though our Lord Jesus Christ was equal in nature and perfections to the Father, he was so far officially subordinate as to allow of his being “sent.” *Hath everlasting life*] The words “everlasting life,” here, imply not so much ever-continued being, as that felicitous existence which springs from the abiding possession of the love of God. The word “hath,” being in the present tense, shows that the believer is now made partaker of this blessedness. And this view is agreeable to general experience. Says Mr. Wesley, “The love of God is everlasting life. It is, in substance, the life of heaven. Now every one that believes, loves God, and therefore hath everlasting life.” *Shall not come into condemnation*] That is, shall not be condemned.



25 Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live.

26 For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself;

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“Condemnation” is a sentence pronounced against an evil work, and is therefore caused by sin. It may proceed either from the man’s conscience, or from God. 1 John iii. 20. The believer, however, “cometh not into,” that is, is not subject to, “condemnation,” from God, because his former sins are pardoned, and the Spirit of God keepeth him, so long as he steadfastly believes, from all wilful violations of the divine will; and his own heart condemns him not, because “he is the child of God.” Rom. viii. 16. There is, then, “no condemnation to him that is in Christ Jesus,” &c. Rom. viii. 1. *Is passed from death unto life*] By “death” is meant the estate of sin and misery natural to fallen man, and by “life” the condition of holiness and happiness peculiar to the Christian. The “passing from” the one to the other denotes the change of *nature* and of *relation* which the believer undergoes at the time of his conversion.

Verse 25. *The hour—now is*] That is, is now at hand. *When the dead shall hear the voice, &c.*] These words seem to be spoken with special reference to the effects produced by the preaching of the gospel, as manifested in the awakening and conversion of men; though they are usually supposed to have reference also to those acts of extraordinary power, the raising of Jairus’s daughter, the widow’s son, &c. At least, they will hold good of both classes of events. “The voice,” &c., denotes the instrumentality by which those spoken of shall be aroused, and is said to be that of “the Son of God,” because it is he

27 And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man.

who imparts to it its effect. *They that hear shall live*—Shall be restored to active bodily life, or raised to the life of faith, as the case may be.

Verse 26. *As the Father hath life in himself*] These words may imply, 1st. That God exists by a necessity of his nature, because it is his nature *to be*. “From everlasting to everlasting thou art God.” 2d. That he is the source of life to all things. “With thee is the fountain of life.” Psa. xxxvi. 9. The context points out the latter to be the sense here mainly intended. *So hath he given, &c.*] “So” means in the same manner—to the same extent. It corresponds with the word “as” in the beginning of the verse. The Son is thus made, equally with the Father, the giver of life—natural, spiritual, and eternal.

Verse 27. *Authority to execute judgment*] “Authority,” here, means the *right* and *power* to perform certain acts, and to “execute judgment,” is *to judge*. This “authority to execute judgment” is probably to be primarily understood of that power whereby Christ frees the penitent believer, in view of his faith, from the condemnation under which sin had brought him, when he absolves him from the curse of a broken law. The words may also be construed with reference to the general judgment: indeed, most commentators explain them in that sense solely. *Because he is the Son of man*] Or, because he is a man, as well as God. The apostle Paul (Phil. ii. 7–10) ascribes the exaltation of Christ to the office of “Mediator between God and man,” to the fact of his having assumed human nature. “There is here,” says Bloomfield, “a reference to the incarnation of Christ, which implies his

28 Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice,

29 And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

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acquaintance with human infirmity, and consequently his fitness to be our Judge. This is strongly confirmed by Heb. iv. 14, 15." "How interesting the thought," observes Professor Ripley, "that the Saviour and Judge of men, while, on the one hand, he is keenly alive to the honour of God, has also, on the other hand, a most tender sympathy for human beings."

Verses 28, 29. *Marvel not at this*] As if he had said, "Wonder not at what the Son of man hath said of this moral revivification—this recalling to spiritual life;" for *all that are in the graves, &c.*] That is, all the dead, of every age and nation. These words evidently refer to the general resurrection at the end of the world, and the judgment connected with it. *Shall hear his voice*] Meaning, shall obey his authority, though probably summoned by another. *They that have done good*] That is, they who were true believers at the time of their departure from this world. *Resurrection of life*] Shall be raised unto a life of unending bliss. *They that have done evil*] Those who, at their decease, were unreconciled to God. The possession or lack of justifying faith will determine the assignment to one or other of these estates: and the sentence once passed, is irrevocable. Matt. xxv. 46.

## LESSON XXV. [Date, A. D. 28]

*Jesus asserts and proves the dignity of his office.*

## JOHN v. 30-47.

**I** CAN of mine own self do nothing : as I hear, I judge : and my judgment is just ; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.  
 31 If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true.

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## NOTES ON JOHN v. 30-47.

Verse 30. *Of mine own self*] Meaning that he, Christ, would not do any thing, in his work as Mediator or as Judge, from any motive, to any end, or by any power, contrary to the Father. In the discharge of his office, therefore, there will be a full and entire concurrence between them. *As I hear, I judge*] Or, *shall* “judge,” or determine. The words, “as I hear,” are used to denote that full and perfect knowledge, both of the mind of the Father and the character of the persons judged, by the possession of which Christ should be enabled to judge “righteous judgment” in each case. The expression is, perhaps, used in allusion to human courts, where the judges found their sentences upon the testimony of witnesses and the laws of the country. *My judgment is just, because, &c.*] These words do not imply that *his own* judgment would be wrong, if he sought his own will ; but, 1st. That he had no private ends, no improper bias, as human judges sometimes have, but which he, from his nature, could not have ; and, 2d. That as he would do only according to the will of the Father, his decision *must* be proper, because the Father is absolutely perfect.

Verse 31. *If I bear witness of myself*] Meaning, if I have no other evidence than my own assertion. To

32 There 's another that beareth witness of me ; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true.

33 Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth.

34 But I receive not testimony from man : but these things I say, that ye might be saved.

“bear witness” is to testify. In all that has gone before Jesus adduced no *proof* that he is really what his language implies him to be—a divine personage. He now proceeds to bring forward some appropriate evidences of his being the Messiah. The evidence he produces is three-fold : 1st. The testimony of John the Baptist, verse 32, &c. ; 2d. The testimony of his own miracles, verse 36 ; 3d. The testimony of the Father given in the Scriptures, verse 37, &c. *My witness is not true*] This does not mean that a man’s testimony respecting himself is necessarily false, for such is not the case ; but that in law a man’s testimony of himself is not, generally speaking, acknowledged as evidence, and therefore is not admitted.—*Campbell*. Wesley and Bloomfield render, “My witness is not *valid*.”

Verse 32. *There is another, &c.*] Commentators are not agreed whether our Lord refers here to the Father or to John the Baptist. The context, however, would seem to decide in favour of the latter interpretation, more especially as the testimony of the Father is directly appealed to in the thirty-seventh verse.

Verse 33. *Ye sent unto John*] Namely, by the deputation of priests and Levites who waited on him while he was baptizing at Bethabara, or Bethany, John i. 19–27, on which occasion the Baptist bore strong testimony to the exalted nature and office of Christ.

Verse 34. *I receive not, &c.*] Meaning that he needed

35 He was a burning and a shining light ; and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light.

not man's testimony, because he had evidence of a higher order. *These things I say, &c.*] From this it appears that John's testimony was referred to chiefly with the benevolent design of contributing to the salvation of his hearers : because as "all men regarded John as a prophet," his word might be reasonably expected to have much weight with them.

Verse 35. *He was a burning and shining light*] It is supposed that the Baptist was now in prison, and had been so for some months. For this reason, perhaps, Jesus says "he *was*," and not he *is*, "a burning," &c. Clarke says that the word "light" would have been better rendered *lamp*. The Jews were greatly in the habit of calling eminent teachers *lights* or *lamps*—a very striking figure, aptly expressing the *illuminating* effects of their instructions. From this custom our Lord's mode of speech is doubtless derived. Some commentators (among others, Dr. Clarke) suppose that by the expressions, *burning* and *shining*, certain specific traits of John's character and instructions are meant—"burning" being used to denote his zeal, and the "shining" the clearness of his teaching. Mr. Wesley's comment is, "Inwardly burning with love and zeal, outwardly shining in all holiness." Dr. Campbell translates the passage, "He was *the lighted* and shining lamp ;" and observes, "John's ministry was of a peculiar character ; he was the single prophet in whom the old dispensation had its completion, and by whom the new was introduced ; therefore, until our Lord's ministry took place, John may be justly said to have been *the light* of that generation. *Ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light*] The words, "rejoice in his light,"

36 But I have greater witness than *that* of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.

37 And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape.

denote the extreme eagerness and joy with which the Jews received John's message. "For a season" means, for a short time—probably his great popularity had begun to wane before he was cast into prison.

Verse 36. *Greater witness, &c.*] Stronger and more conclusive testimony. *The works, &c.*] Referring, perhaps, particularly to his miracles, though not excluding any of the works proper to him as the Messiah. The kind of proof here referred to was "greater witness" than the testimony of John, because it was undeniable proof that God "was with him."

Verse 37. *The Father himself hath borne witness, &c.*] Namely, that Jesus was a divine being; for this seems to be the point our Lord was striving to establish. Judging from the context, it would seem that the particular testimony of God here alluded to is the evidence given to the Son in the Old Testament Scriptures. See verse 39. *Ye have neither heard his voice nor seen his shape*] It is suggested by some distinguished expositors that the declaration, "Ye have neither heard," &c., should be limited to their not having "heard" God bear *audible* testimony to Christ. If this explanation be the true one, it would seem that the baptism of our Lord by John was private, not public. The word "shape" is used in the sense of *form, appearance*; and is not put for God himself. To illustrate:—If a man put on a mask, and otherwise disguise his person, the *appearance* he has assumed is

38 And ye have not his word abiding in you : for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not.

39 Search the Scriptures ; for in them ye think ye have eternal life : and they are they which testify of me.

visible, but the man himself is not. It does not, therefore, imply that God has any bodily "shape," for, being pure spirit, he cannot have ; John i. 18 ; but, as he openly showed himself in former times to Moses, Num xii. 8, this expression also should, in the estimation of the commentators just referred to, be limited to God's not *visibly* bearing testimony in favour of Jesus. Does not this interpretation go far to remove a few *seeming*—not real—contradictions with which the subject of the manifestation of Deity is encompassed ?

Verse 38. *Ye have not his word, &c.*] God's "word" here denotes all those revelations of the character and office of the Messiah contained in the Old Testament Scriptures, as before stated. These they had misinterpreted, and consequently their true import did not "abide" or *dwell* with them. Their present conduct furnished proof of the truth of this allegation ; for him whom "God had sent they received not."

Verse 39. *Search the Scriptures*] Here meaning the books of the Old Testament ; the New Testament was not then written. To "search" means to *seek diligently*. The original word is said to be exceedingly emphatic, and is used to express the *most careful, anxious* investigation. So it is used of miners, digging for precious metals ; of a dog, hunting for prey, &c. Commentators are not agreed whether these words should be understood as an injunction to the Jews to search their sacred writings, or as a declaration that they did so. Most of them, however, are of opinion that they are to be understood in the



latter sense, as that best accords with the remainder of the verse, and the verse following. If this be true, the passage should be rendered, *Ye search the Scriptures*, which translation the original will well bear. *In them ye think ye have, &c.*] Meaning, that they acknowledged them to point out the way to "eternal life," and therefore read them.

In whichever of the above senses our Lord is to be understood as having addressed the Jews, it is very important to us that we diligently and prayerfully "read the Scriptures." "The Abbe Winkelman, perhaps the most classical writer upon the fine arts, after descanting with great zeal upon the perfection of sculpture exhibited in the Apollo Belvidere, says to young artists, 'Go and study it; and if you see no great beauty in it to captivate you, go again. And if you still discover none, go again and again. Go until you *feel it*; for be assured it is there.' So it may be said of the Bible. It has excellences which, the more they are discovered, will the more lead you to say with one who was no indolent or passive reader of God's word, 'Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wonderful things out of thy law.' The treasures of this rich mine are not all found upon its surface. It was the remark of a sensible and thinking layman, many years ago made to the writer, that 'it sometimes seemed to him that the Bible is as much greater than all other books, as its Author is greater than all other authors.' I am well persuaded that the seeming extravagance of such an observation will diminish with our increasing acquaintance with this wonderful volume. 'Search,' then, 'the Scriptures.' Search them daily. Search them not from curiosity merely, though curiosity and learning are amply remunerated by the search; but

40 And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.

41 I receive not honour from men.

42 But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you.

from a deep and personal interest in their instructions." —  
*Spring.*

Verse 40. *And ye will not come to me*] Meaning, will not accept, or confide in, me as your Teacher and Saviour. This verse should be read in intimate connection with the preceding, thus: "Ye search the Scriptures, —and they testify of me: but yet ye will not come," &c. *That ye might have life*] The "life" spoken of is spiritual and eternal life, and is conferred by Christ, its author, on all them that "come to him," but on no others. Reader, hast thou availed thyself of the gospel invitation? "Come unto me," says the Saviour, "all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." O do not tarry. The invitations and immunities of the gospel, being freely proffered to all men within its reach, may be embraced by them: if they refuse to do this, their destruction is their own fault.

Verses 41, 42. *I receive not, &c.*] Intimating that though he was thus solicitous to be acknowledged by them in his true character, it was not for his own honour merely, but for their salvation. *Ye have not the love of God*] The Jews professed great zeal for the honour of God and his law: hence they "sought to kill Jesus" for a supposed violation of one of its precepts. He here assures them of the idleness of the pretence, and apparently attributes their want of faith in him to the fact that they had not the love of God in them.

Verse 43. *In my Father's name*] That is, clothed with his authority, as his doctrines and miracles abundantly

43 I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not : if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.

44 How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that *cometh* from God only ?

45 Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. there is *one* that accuseth you, *even* Moses, in whom ye trust.

proved. *If another shall come*] Some false Christ. *In his own name*] By his own authority—asserting himself to be the Messiah, but furnishing no evidence to support his pretensions. *Him ye will receive*] Historians state that about and after the fall of Jerusalem, several persons professed themselves to be the Messiah, who were followed by almost incredible numbers of the people.

Verse 44. *Receive honour one of another*] That is, who *inordinately seek* the praise of men, which they seem to have been more solicitous to obtain than they were to secure the approbation of God. Such a disposition is the offspring of selfishness, and inflates the heart with love of the world, pride, &c.; affections altogether opposed to that humility of spirit required in the suppliant for God's favour. The *undue* love of any object will bar Christ from the heart.

Verse 45. *Do not think I will accuse you*] To "accuse" is to bring charges against. These Jews had accused Jesus of a violation of the sabbath, which charge he had disproved. It *may be* that he here alludes to this circumstance. *One accuseth you—Moses, &c.*] Namely, for their infidelity. The import of the verse is, "Ye will be condemned for not believing the writings of Moses, which testify of me, both by express predictions and by typical representations."

46 For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me : for he wrote of me.

47 But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words ?

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Verse 46. *Had ye believed Moses, &c.*] Their pretences for not believing in Christ were these two—their love to God, and their reverence for the law of Moses. Christ shows, at verse 42, that they had *no true love to God* ; and in this verse that they were deficient in *true faith* in Moses ; for if they had been influenced by a right faith they would have believed on him, (Christ.)

Verse 47. *How shall ye believe, &c.*] That is, Ye *cannot* believe “my words ;” because the same perverse will which blinded them to the right understanding of Moses, would also prevent their truly believing on Him of whom “Moses wrote.”

## LESSON XXVI. [Date, A. D. 28.

*Christ defends his disciples against a charge of violating the sabbath by plucking some ears of corn.*—MATT. xii. 1-14; MARK ii. 23-28; LUKE vi. 1-5.

## LUKE vi. 1.

AND it came to pass, on the second sabbath after the first, that he went through the corn-fields; and his disciples plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing *them in their hands*.

## NOTES ON LUKE vi. 1.

Verse 1. *Second sabbath after the first, &c.*] Literally rendered, the passage would read, the *second-first* sabbath. The law of the passover required that on the 14th of the month Nisan the paschal lamb should be killed; the day following (the 15th) was the first of the feast of unleavened bread, and was commanded to be kept *as a sabbath*, no servile work being allowed on that day; on the 16th, or second day of the feast of unleavened bread, a ripe sheaf of barley was offered, as the first-fruits of the harvest, and seven full weeks, exclusive of this day, or fifty days inclusive, brought the feast of pentecost. The sabbath in the first of these seven weeks is conjectured to be the one here spoken of; and it might be called the "second-first sabbath," because it was the first *ordinary* sabbath in the seven weeks preceding pentecost, but the second sabbath in regard to the *extraordinary* one of the fifteenth of Nisan. *He went through the corn-fields*] If the above supposition be correct, the Saviour was probably still in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, the feast of unleavened bread not having yet come to a close. He was at this time, doubtless, on his way to or from some place of worship. *His disciples plucked the ears of corn,*

## MATT. xii. 2-8.

2 But when the Pharisees saw *it*, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath-day.

&c.] This they had a perfect right to do by the law, under certain restrictions. See Deut. xxiii. 25. The word "corn," in the Scriptures, is used as a general term to express several kinds of grain, as wheat, rye, barley, &c., and not, as with us, merely Indian corn or maize. Indeed, maize was not known in Palestine. The word, probably, here means *barley*. Should the feast mentioned John v. 1, &c., be that of pentecost, however, as some suppose, *then* the grain most likely to be meant would be wheat, which was usually reaped about that time. This transaction must have taken place after the second day of the feast of unleavened bread, for it was unlawful, until the wave-sheaf or first-fruits had been offered, to eat of the new grain. Matthew (xii. 1) assigns as a reason for this act of the disciples that they "were hungry." *Rubbed it in their hands*] To separate the grain from the chaff.

## MATT. xii. 2-8.

Verse 2. *The Pharisees, &c.*] For an account of this sect, see on Matt. iii. 7, p. 165. *Not lawful to do upon the sabbath*] The Pharisees appear to have regarded this "plucking" a few ears by the disciples, to satisfy their hunger, as a kind of *reaping*, which, being common work, was, as a general thing, prohibited on the day of rest. The Jewish teachers had erroneously grafted on the original law of the sabbath many superstitious and oppressive regulations, of which our Lord took frequent occasion to show his disregard, in order to place the observance of that day on right grounds, that it might thus the more

3 But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did when he was a hungered, and they that were with him ;

4 How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the show-bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests ?

forcibly commend itself to the convictions of reason and of an enlightened piety. While, therefore, he openly condemned, both by precept and example, such strict regulations as converted the sabbath-day, which it was originally designed should be accounted "a delight" and "honourable," into "a yoke of superstitious bondage," he gave no liberty to apply it to secular purposes, or to make it a season of sloth or carnal pleasure.

Verses 3, 4. *Have ye not read what David did, &c.*] See 1 Sam. xxi. 1-6. The example to which our Lord here refers, in order to refute the cavilling of the Pharisees, shows that the case of the disciples was one of real hunger, not to be sustained without faintness, and being unfitted for duty, as was that of David and his companions. The fact alluded to was familiar to the Jews present, and the adducing of it must have had considerable weight with them ; for though not exactly similar to the case of the disciples, it involved the same *principle*, namely, that the law, rightly understood, never did exclude the performance of works of *necessity* ; and they could not consistently condemn in Jesus what they allowed in David. *House of God*] Meaning the *tabernacle*, for the temple was not then built. *The show-bread*] Literally, "the bread of the face, or presence." This consisted of twelve cakes, emblematical of the twelve tribes of Israel, which were constantly kept on the golden table in the sanctuary. These were renewed every sabbath, the old ones being taken away for the use of the priests, who alone

5 Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath-days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless?

6 But I say unto you, That in this place is *one* greater than the temple.

were permitted to eat of them. The account given by Samuel of this incident states that Ahimelech was high priest at the time, while Mark (ii. 26) says it occurred in "the days of Abiathar the high priest," meaning in the days of that Abiathar who afterward became high priest. It is supposed that our Lord used the name of Abiathar rather than that of Ahimelech because he was the more distinguished man, and therefore better known to those present.

Verse 5. *Have ye not read, &c.*] Meaning, not that the words following were found in the law, but, that by the law the priests were obliged to perform such offices as, were works of necessity or of piety prohibited, would be a profanation of the sabbath. *The priests in the temple*] That portion of them then on duty. *Profane the sabbath*] By performing on that day the work of ordinary days, such as killing the sacrifice, &c., and thus putting it to a *common use*. Indeed, this work, in some particulars, was increased on the sabbath. Num. xxviii. 3, 9. *Are blameless*] Then not *every* work performed on the sacred day was a violation of its rest.

Verse 6. *In this place is one greater, &c.*] Meaning himself. Our Lord here anticipates an objection to his argument which would naturally arise in the minds of the Pharisees, namely, that the priests in the temple were exempted from the rest of the sabbath, under the authority of Him who was greater than the temple, even God; but that his disciples had no such authority to plead in



7 But if ye had known what *this* meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.

behalf of their act. To this probable objection he replies, "In this place is one greater than the temple." Now the Jews esteemed nothing greater than the temple, saving God: here, therefore, would be, in their estimation, a clear assumption of divinity, which is still more strongly asserted in verse eight.

Verse 7. *If ye had known, &c.*] Accusing them of ignorance of the true spirit of their law. *I will have mercy, and not sacrifice*] That is, when the observance of the one clashes with that of the other. The quotation is from Hosea vi. 6, where God is said "to desire mercy, and not sacrifice." By "sacrifice" is meant the performance of any of the ceremonies of religion—as the observance of the sabbath, &c. None of these are of light import: still, if attention to them comes in contact with works of necessity or of mercy, they are to give way, "because," says Mr. Wesley, "these being only means of religion, are suspended of course if circumstances occur wherein they clash with love, which is the end of it." *The guiltless*] Meaning the disciples, whom he thus pronounced innocent of the charge of having violated the sabbath—they had done nothing but what the law, rightly construed, justified them in doing.

At this point Mark (chap. ii. 27) inserts an additional thought offered by our Lord in vindication of the disciples, namely, "the sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath." That is, the sabbath was appointed for the benefit of *man*—of man everywhere—and therefore its requirements, though strict, are not of so binding a nature as to oblige him to subject himself to misery

in order to observe it. Man was first created, and then the sabbath was made for his bodily comfort and spiritual edification. Says Mr. Watson, "When it is said that *the sabbath was made for man*, let it be remarked that no laxity of *religious* regard to the sabbath can be justified by this sentiment. Wo to those who thus pervert the words of truth and mercy! The universal obligation of the sabbath is unequivocally asserted in these words: *The sabbath was made for MAN*,—not for Jews only, or for any other class of men, but for MAN; for man even in his innocence and purity, and therefore for all his descendants; for man considered as a moral and accountable being, who needs to hold special intercourse with his Maker, who ought to be detached from worldly cares, that he may do this with a calm and recollected spirit; and who is under obligation in public assemblies to acknowledge God, and to keep up the knowledge and influence of truth in the world from age to age. And when it is said that it *was made for man*, the meaning is evident, that it was instituted chiefly, and in its highest reasons, to promote in him the fear and love of God, by giving him leisure for religious exercises, and appointing their observance. This is the meaning of God's 'blessing and sanctifying the day,'—consecrating and setting it apart for such hallowed services as should bring man into communion with God, and thus secure his constant 'blessing.' Many subordinate ends of human interest and happiness result from sabbatical observance, which indeed prove that duty and felicity are always in the result bound up together; but the grand character and end of this divine institution is, that it was made for the purpose of promoting the spiritual and eternal interests of the human race; and whatever is inconsistent

8 For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day.

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with these is an obvious violation of the law of the sabbath, and a grievous sin against our own mercy."

Verse 8. *The Son of man*] Namely, Jesus Christ. *Is Lord of the sabbath-day*] "Our blessed Lord here asserts his right, 1. To interpret the law of the sabbath; 2. To alter or modify it as he pleased; 3. To alter the time of its observance, which he afterward did through his apostles, from the seventh to the first day of the week. And if any ask our authority for observing this day, and not the Jewish sabbath, the answer is, that in the Christian Scriptures it bears the name of '*the Lord's day*,' with manifest reference to this text, in which Christ asserts his power over it, as Lawgiver: *the Son of man is LORD also of the sabbath.*"—*Watson*.

## LESSON XXVII. [Date, A. D. 28.]

*Christ heals a man with a withered hand, and by that means again excites the envy of the scribes and Pharisees, who, together with the Herodians, seek to slay him—He withdraws himself, and is followed by great multitudes.*—MATT. xii. 9-21; MARK iii. 1-12; LUKE vi. 6-11.

## MATT. xii. 9-21.

AND when he was departed thence, he went into ~~the~~ <sup>their</sup> synagogue :

10 And behold, there was a man which had *his* hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath-days? that they might accuse him.

## NOTES ON MATT. xii. 9-21.

Verse 9. *When he was departed*] That is, after his departure. *He went into their synagogue*] Meaning, into the synagogue of the people to whom he had now come. From Luke vi. 6, it appears that this was *not* on the sabbath he defended the disciples against the charge of the Pharisees, noted in the last lesson, but on "another sabbath." It is almost certain that our Lord was now in Galilee, and most probably at Capernaum.

Verse 10. *There was a man which had his hand withered*] Luke says it was the "right hand" which was affected. This "withered hand" is supposed by many to have been a form of palsy called the catalepsy, in which the part affected "appears diminished in size, and dried up." Bloomfield, however, objects to this opinion, and states that it was, "according to the most accurate inquirers, an *atrophy of the limb*, occasioned by an evaporation of the vital juices, involving an inability to move the nerves and muscles." The case cited 1 Kings xiii. 4-6 is supposed to have been of a similar character to the one

11 And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath-day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?

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here introduced to our notice. *They asked, Is it lawful to heal*] The statement given Luke vi. 7, shows that by "they," here, certain "scribes and Pharisees" are meant, who were malignantly "watching him," to see "whether he would heal on the sabbath-day," with the design of accusing him if he did. Jesus, knowing their evil intentions, did not immediately answer them, but directed the man to "stand forth in the midst." It is said to have been a disputed point among the Jews, whether the administering of medicines or other remedies to the sick, on the sabbath, was not a desecration of the holy day. The more punctilious among the Pharisees believed it to be a violation of the sacred rest; though the generally received opinion probably was, that in dangerous cases, remedies might be innocently employed at that time. It may be reasonably inferred that the persons who put the question, "Is it lawful," &c., were of that class who entertained and taught the opinion that it was *not lawful*, and sought to render Christ offensive to the people, should he either declare the practice lawful, or cure the man without giving them any answer. They doubtless *expected* he would heal the man; and when he had "stood forth," Jesus addressed himself to the Pharisees, saying, "I will ask you one thing: Is it lawful on the sabbath-days to do good or to do evil? to save life or to destroy it?" meaning to kill, as is plain from Mark iii. 4. Our Lord evidently designed here to institute a comparison; the question should therefore read, Is it not *more lawful* to do good *than* to do evil? to save life *than* to kill? By this question he ma-

12 How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath-days.

nifests his knowledge of the malicious design with which the Pharisees had interrogated him:—that under all this show of zeal for the due observance of the sabbath, they were themselves, even on that holy day, plotting against his life: for the law condemned the sabbath-breaker to death. Exod. xxxi. 14, 15. They were doubtless confounded at this exposure of their secret intentions, and therefore made no answer to our Lord's question. Mark iii. 4.

Verse 12. *How much better is a man than a sheep, &c.]* The kind treatment of brute animals was strongly inculcated in the Jewish law: see Deut. xxii. 4: and even those sticklers for a superstitious observance of the sabbath with whom Jesus was now discoursing, would not hesitate to extricate a sheep from any pit into which it had fallen, or other calamity which endangered its safety, even on that holy day. Man is a rational creature, capable of knowing, loving, and enjoying God, and is therefore "better" than the best of the brute creation. Just so far as a human being is "better," that is, of more consequence, than a sheep, in that proportion is the duty more binding to relieve him from pain and rescue him from danger. *Wherefore it is lawful to do well, &c.]* In this phrase is embraced all the offices of charity and tenderness. The performance of the lovely, pleasing acts of beneficence, is preferable to any ceremonial observance; because more acceptable to God and beneficial to man.

Having thus exposed and answered the Pharisees, our Lord, according to Mark, "looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts." Mark iii. 5. The emotion here termed anger was a holy

13 Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he stretched *it* forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other.

14 Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him.

displeasure, without any mixture of ill-will or hatred, as is clear from the "grief" by which it was accompanied, and was probably caused by the malicious intent and hypocrisy with which the Pharisees had put their question. Whitby defines it, "a displeasure of the mind, arising from an injury done or intended to ourselves or others; with a desire to remove the injury."

Verse 13. *Stretch forth thy hand*] This was a remarkable commandment. The man *might* have said that he had no strength; that it was a thing which he could not do. Yet, being commanded, it was his duty to obey. *Stretched it forth*] Through the power which was communicated to him by Christ, in the act of obeying. Had not the man made the attempt, however, there is no reason to suppose he would have been healed. This cure furnishes an illustration of the nature and benefits of saving faith. No sooner does the penitent sinner really endeavour to cast himself on the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, than the power to exercise faith in the atonement is imparted unto him, and his soul is justified. "Faith," says Dr. Clarke, "disregards apparent impossibilities, where there is a command and promise of God. The *effort* to believe is often that faith by which the soul is healed."

Verse 14. *The Pharisees—held a council*] In connection, according to Mark iii. 6, with the Herodians. Luke says, "they were filled with madness," probably at the exposure and implied reproof of their wicked design. "From the slight notice taken of the Herodians in the

15 But when Jesus knew *it*, he withdrew himself from thence : and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all :

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New Testament, and the silence of Josephus, nothing *certain* with respect to them can be determined ; but the prevailing and best founded opinion seems to be, that they did not form any distinct *religious sect*, (though probably Sadducees in doctrine, as was Herod,) but were rather a *political* party, composed of the courtiers, ministers, domestics, and adherents generally of Herod ; who maintained, with him, that the dominion of the Romans over the Jews was lawful, and ought to be submitted to ; and that under their present circumstances the Jews might, allowably, resort to Gentile usages and customs." —*Bloomfield*. *How they might destroy him*] This was the business on which they consulted, and to secure this object these usually inveterate enemies became as friends. The narrative ought to impress our minds with a deep sense of the evils resulting from prejudice, and lead us to guard against the admission of so baneful a passion into our bosoms. Through its influence the display of power and goodness exhibited in the cure of this man, which ought to have excited the admiration and love of all the beholders, awakened within these Pharisees the unholy feelings of malice and envy.

Verse 15. *When Jesus knew it*] Rather, *Jesus, knowing it*. He was intimately acquainted with their whole procedure. *Withdrew himself*] That he might avoid the rage of his enemies, the work of his ministry not being yet accomplished. Our Lord's conduct in this particular was agreeable to a direction on the subject he afterward gave his followers : "When they persecute you in one city flee ye to another." Mark says, (iii. 7,) he went "to



16 And charged them that they should not make him known :

17 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying,

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the sea"—that is, of Galilee—accompanied by his disciples. "It is the part of prudence and Christian charity," observes Dr. A. Clarke, "not to provoke, if it be possible to avoid it, the blind and hardened, and to take from them the occasion of sin. Yield to the stream when you cannot stem it." *Great multitudes followed him*] From all parts of the country, and even from beyond the precincts of Palestine, (Mark iii. 7, 8,) allured by the report of the "great things they had heard of him," and the desire to be freed from the diseases and possessions under which many of them were suffering. Mark iii. 10, 11. So great did the concourse become, that Jesus directed his disciples to prepare "a small ship" to wait on him, because of the multitude who "pressed upon him." These persons were, as yet, unwarped by the prejudices of the Pharisees.

Verse 16. *Should not make him known*] Meaning, that they should not declare him to be the person who had healed them. "This was not enjoined either to disarm the rage of the Pharisees, as some have supposed ; or, as others, to prevent their adding to their sins by avoiding all excitement to renewed efforts to persecute and destroy him ; but, as the application of the following prophecy shows, out of pure dislike to that clamorous and tumultuous popularity which now followed him, and which he took every means, consistent with his public usefulness, to repress."—*Watson*.

Verse 17. *That it might be fulfilled, &c.*] Meaning, that thus was fulfilled. *Esaias*] Isaiah ; from the first four

18 Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased; I will put my Spirit upon him, and he shall show judgment to the Gentiles.

verses of whose forty-second chapter the quotation is drawn, and with the Hebrew version of which it more nearly agrees in sense than it does with the Greek translation, though it is not a *literal* rendering of either.

Verse 18. *My servant*] Christ is here spoken of in his complex character, in which alone he can be regarded as a servant. See Phil. ii. 7, 8. From this humiliation of Christ we may learn, 1st. The deep demerit of sin, and God's hatred of it; 2d. The love of God to fallen man. The "exceeding sinfulness of sin," and the awful consequences flowing from it to the sinner, may be inferred from the fact that no satisfaction less than that of the assumption of our nature by God's co-eternal and co-equal Fellow, in that nature to make propitiation for sin, could do away the wrong which the divine government had sustained through man's transgression, or buy off the offender from the punishment to which he had subjected himself: and the *love* of God is exhibited in the astounding fact, that the invaluable sacrifice was made. "He, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man." *Whom I have chosen*] Namely, to make atonement for the sins of men, and thus to restore to them the enjoyment of God's favour and the forfeited inheritance of heaven. *I will put my Spirit, &c.*] This promise was remarkably fulfilled to the Messiah at his baptism. Matt. iii. 16, 17. *He shall show judgment to the Gentiles*] "He shall show judgment," here, means, he shall make a revelation of God's truth and mercy; namely, by proclaiming the gospel, or causing it to be proclaimed, even to heathen

19 He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets.

20 A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory.

nations. The word rendered "judgment" is said to signify a body of laws or doctrines.

Verse 19. *He shall not strive, nor cry, &c.*] Meaning, he should not be contentious or clamorous; but gentle, quiet, and lowly. To these particulars "our Lord's conduct so strikingly corresponded, and in so natural and unaffected a manner, that this agreement proves that he was the person intended in the prophecy. A dignified humility, an entire deadness to human applause, and the meekest submission to his whole appointed course of reproach and calumny, are among the most obvious traits of his character as a public teacher."—*Watson*.

Verse 20. *A bruised reed shall he not break*] The "reed" is an emblem of weakness, as well as of instability, 2 Kings xviii. 21; Matt. xi. 7; and the figure is here employed to denote the condition of those whose spirits are so "bruised" or wounded by a deep sense of sinfulness and unworthiness as almost to destroy all hope of forgiveness: a sorrow under which the spirit bows, as a reed which, being bruised, can no longer stand erect: hence, to "hang down the head like a bulrush," or reed, has become proverbial. *Smoking flax shall he not quench*] "The Jews," observes Bishop Pearce, "used to employ flax for the wick of lamps," and the allusion is to the faintly burning and smoking wick, ready to expire for lack of sufficient oil. The figure may be regarded as the representation of one in whom the spiritual life is so feeble, as to be almost ready to expire. Bloomfield re-

21 And in his name shall the Gentiles trust.

marks that by the negation—the bruised reed he will *not* break, the smoking flax he will *not* quench—is implied the affirmation of the contrary; as though he had said, “He will *strengthen* wavering faith, and will *rekindle* nearly extinct piety.” *Till he send forth judgment unto victory*] By “judgment” the revelation of God’s truth, as imbodyed in the gospel, is still supposed to be intended. This will continue to spread until at length it shall prevail over all opposition, and every nation shall receive the law “out of Zion.”

Verse 21. *In his name*] Meaning in Him—Christ. *Shall the Gentiles trust*] Clarke renders, “they shall *hope*,” that is, for instruction and salvation. The term is equivalent to *confide*. “The whole [prophecy] has reference to the *quiet* and *unostentatious* mode in which Christ promulgated his religion; not resorting to violence or clamour, or offering resistance to oppression; but employing the mildest means: by which, however, it would at length be spread over all the nations of the universe.”

Reader, has this gospel been unto thee “the power of God unto salvation?” If so, “hold fast the beginning of thy confidence unto the end,” for in Christ thou mayest confidently trust; if not, remember, there is no other name by which thou canst be saved than that of Jesus Christ; and that if thou wilt believe in him, thou mayest be saved *now*.

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